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ABSTRACT

This issue has 29 articles, both practical and theoretical in nature, that deal with aspects of writing at all levels. Topics range from conceiving ideas for compositions to evaluating finished works, from generating sentences to correcting spelling, from using old-time radio horror shows to stimulate creativity to making technical reports. Other articles address aspects of the back-to-basics movement, provide recommendations from the perspective of the British middle school, suggest ways to humanize the teaching of composition through continuing adult education, and provide interviews with two writers of adolescent novels. Authors include, among others, Gerald G. Gregory, Jonathan Lovell, Donald R. Gallo, R. Baird Shuman, and Kenneth Donelson.
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Preface

The topic of writing these days needs little introduction. Nearly everyone speaks about the need for improving the writing abilities of school children, of students taking the SATs, of young adults seeking jobs, of secretaries, lawyers, newspaper reporters--in short, of most citizens of the United States. When we informally asked elementary and secondary teachers of language arts and English in Connecticut schools to name topics they felt the greatest need to be informed about, the overwhelming response was COMPOSITION.

So we've assembled this collection of original articles--both theoretical and practical--from classroom teachers and college researchers throughout the country and one from England, plus interviews with two professional writers of young adult books, on a variety of aspects of writing at all levels, from elementary school to adult education--from conceiving ideas to evaluating finished products, from generating sentences to correcting spelling, from listening to radio horror shows to making technical reports.

Special thanks go to a number of people for their efforts in producing this the largest issue of the CEJ ever published: to Sandy Rich, Pat Walsh, and Meg Voples of the CCSC Graphics Department for the cover and titles, to the Curry Copy Center for their cheerful service and rapid printing, and to Ronni Danna for her continuing conscientious typing of photo-ready copy.

Donald Ellis

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Battling the Basics, Or Coping With the Clamor Over Composition

Robert W. Reising

It was Christian Gauss, I believe, who proffered that "Truth lies in making small distinctions," and at present neither proponents of the "Back-to-Basics" movement nor those who minimize it are apparently of a mind to heed his advice, especially when they focus on composition teaching. The former, most of them outside the English-teaching profession, are usually so intent on fast action and even faster results that they reserve little time for distinctions of any sort, and even less for those small ones hinting that the logically sound just may differ from the psychologically and pedagogically sound. Basing their case on "good, old-fashioned common sense," they have a well-intentioned bent for forgetting or avoiding the mounds of evidence that are at variance with "common sense"--good, old-fashioned, or otherwise.

In contrast, those who, consciously or otherwise, pooh-pooh the movement have no greater propensity for distinctions, it seems to me. No less well intentioned and certainly no less intelligent, they have an uncanny knack for overlooking social reality, for falling victim to what might be called "social myopia." Consisting primarily of members of the profession, they seemingly envision an America that is not a literate society but a literary one. Usually suckled on and in the literary tradition, they cling to the belief that in an understanding and appreciation of Shakespeare's imagery and Faulkner's symbolism lies a solution to the nation's ills. "Belles lettres" and "the literary experience" are the shibboleths--and, they maintain, the very heart of a substantial English curriculum, high school or college. Shouts from the marketplace, which, incidentally, is no longer a great distance from the groves of academe, tell them otherwise; yet, true to their preferences, they remain committed to and supportive of an educational task that baffles the imagination: eliciting insightful comments from students who cannot read and critical essays from students who cannot write.

The "Back-to-Basics" movement will die slowly. At least I hope it will. It represents, I firmly believe, an opportunity, unprecedented in recent decades, for people interested in education to engage in meaningful discussion concerning the nature and goals of the nation's institutions of learning. Programs in English--more specifically, programs in composition--are bound to be focal points in that discussion; their importance to the educational endeavor dictates that they be such. I, for one, am happy that they occupy so strategic a position, for the results

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of that discussion can be profoundly beneficial not merely to those who engage in it but, more important, to America's students, present and future.

Zeal, it seems to me, characterizes proponents of the movement; indifference, those who snicker at it. I would thus urge the former to pause long enough to ponder half-a-dozen distinctions key to their position and the latter to stir sufficiently to consider half-a-dozen points central to theirs. If both contingents will give just a wee bit of attention to what follows, their respective stances will be strengthened, I suspect, and the clamor over composition muted--or maybe even turned into a ear-pleasing melody, a possibility which shouldn't upset either group.

First, the half-dozen for the proponents:

(1) While it is logical to argue that written outlines should precede--must precede--the writing of compositions if effective prose is to result, evidence suggests otherwise. Janet Emig's research is enlightening indeed. Completed questionnaires from sixteen professional and academic writers, including persons of the stature of Mark Van Doren, Jerome Bruner, and John Ciardi, "believe the textbook generalization that all writers make written outlines for all forms of writing they do."¹ Diversity and individuality in planning practices characterize the sixteen writers queried--and probably should also characterize any classroom in which composition is going on. Any other conclusion is difficult to reach, especially when the results of Emig's study of 109 expository pieces by 25 eleventh graders in 1964 are considered. She found that there is "no correlation between the presence or absence of any outline and the grade a student receives evaluating how well organized that theme is."²

(2) It is logical, certainly, to contend that the study of grammar improves writing. A truck-load of evidence indicates that it does not. Regardless of the system of grammar employed--traditional, structural, transformational--no one has yet satisfactorily determined that a tie exists. There are excellent reasons why students should study grammar--not the least of which is that anyone making a claim to being educated should know how his or her language structures and works; but none of those reasons relates to writing improvement.³

The high school or college teacher anxious to include study of the language in the composition classroom would be wise, therefore, to switch from grammatical analysis to sentence-combining activities, which do have a favorable effect on writing skills.⁴ Thanks to volumes designed for use in the schools (Sentence Combining, by William Strong, from Random House, and Sentencecraft, by Frank O'Hare, from Ginn), immediate aid is available. And if a teacher, wishing to calm a conscience or a parent that demands "good, old-fashioned, hard-nosed grammar," wants to call such activities "grammar study," so be it. He or she wouldn't be the first one to do so.

(3) It may be logical to assume that the more red ink that appears on a student composition, the more the writer of that composition is sure to learn. After all, common sense indicates that if the student learns one point from one comment, he'll learn twice as much from two comments and sixty-six times as much from sixty-six comments. Right? Well, probably not. Intensive evaluation--the marking of every flaw in student writing--seldom provides dividends equal to the effort. In 1964, Lois V. Arnold concluded on the basis of some well-regarded research that "intensive evaluation is seemingly no more effective than moderate evaluation in improving the quality of written composition."⁵ A year earlier, Paul B. Diederich, one of the outstanding researchers into the composition process, had revealed a similar conviction:

Find in each paper at least one thing, and preferably two or three things, that the student has done well, or better than before. Then, if you must, find one thing, and preferably not more than one thing, that he should try to improve in his next paper...

Learning one new thing per paper is certainly more than most students learn at present. As for the other ninety-nine errors that disfigure the paper and disgrace the school, simply ignore them. If you mark them all, or even half of them, the student learns nothing; he only advances one step further toward a settled conviction that he can't write and that there is no use trying...

If a student concentrates on one error at a time, progress is possible; if he tries to overcome all his weaknesses at once, he will be overwhelmed.⁶

Over ten years have passed since Arnold and Diederich publicized their beliefs, and nothing has occurred in the interim to indicate that their advice is ill founded. Yet, many teachers, from elementary school through graduate school, continue to red-pencil every error on every paper they read. The number and frequency of comments on student papers are not the key to writing improvement; the teacher is. For it is the teacher--and only the teacher--who knows how many comments and what kinds of comments can humanely move a given student or a given class along the oh-so-terribly difficult path to writing proficiency.

(4) Writing is a building process, common sense indicates: a student must command the sentence before moving to the larger element, the paragraph; likewise, he or she must be adept at the paragraph before graduating to the full paper. After all, how can one develop a total composition without having control of the units or parts that go into it? Right? Well, once again, probably not.

"The particle approach," as James Moffett terms it, is questionable at best. Artificially putting words into sentences,

sentences into paragraphs, and paragraphs into papers fails to consider that a writer has the whole discourse, as a gestalt, in mind as he or she evolves and works upon its parts. Chopping it up into bits and pieces, pretending that composing the 500-word essay, for example, is merely a matter of forming strings--of letters first, then words, then sentences, then paragraphs, which, finally, develop into a "full" composition--is misleading, certainly. The human mind simply doesn't work that way as it shapes discourse. Moffett explains why:

About the only thing that really has meaning and motivation and purpose is a whole discourse; that is, some communication complete for its purpose. This could be a label, an ad, a poem, a short story, an essay, a piece of reportage; it could even be a one-sentence thing like a label, a single word, if that's complete for communication purposes. One word on a bottle--"poison"--that's a complete discourse as far as I'm concerned, in that situation. That's not a particle. A proverb is a whole sentence--a complete literary form.⁷

Moffett's beliefs are also those of Bernard J. McCabe, who contends that "instructional work in composition is best developed with larger composition units as opposed to working toward a mastery of their smaller subordinate components."⁸ But what of those smaller subordinate components--should they be overlooked? Of course not, as George Hillocks, Jr., explains: working with the whole composition, whatever it might be, "does not imply that spelling, punctuation, and other mechanical matters should be ignored. They can be dealt with in the context of working with the whole composition, rather than as a prelude to it."⁹

(5) In the furor over basics, it is only logical to assume that the mechanics of writing have declined in recent years. Clearly, arguing that Johnny can no longer write is tantamount to arguing that he can no longer control periods and commas, spell acceptably, or make subjects agree with verbs. No question about it--Johnny has slipped mechanically.

Well, not so. Logic and common sense again fail us. The report of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, Writing Mechanics, 1969-1974, is explicit in identifying "some characteristics of essays that have not changed in the average essay" from a 17 year old:

agreement errors continue to crop up in about 1 out of every 10 sentences; comma splices occur only 5% of the time; the use of dashes, quotation marks, question marks, exclamation points, colons, semicolons or parentheses has remained constant and almost negligible; misspelling in general is not on the increase....;

word-choice and structure errors remain infrequent and display no change in either direction...It seems, then, that most of the "mechanics" are well in hand.¹⁰

Proponents of the "Back-to-Basics" movement who have been hitting the panic button over the mechanics of writing are, therefore, expending their energies needlessly. To be sure, some students--many students--are deficient mechanically; but to believe that most are or that there has been a general decline since 1969 is unwise, given the powerful evidence to the contrary.

(6) Those who argue for common sense and logic in the restructuring of composition programs seldom discuss--or even sense--a weakness which is appallingly pervasive in student writing today. Stated simply, that weakness is the inadequate coherence. Again, the National Assessment study is revealing:

While 85% of papers written by 17 year olds were judged coherent in 1969, only 76% of the 1974 papers were coherent. And this overall drop marks even more dramatic declines in the coherence of weaker papers: while the percentage of all papers judged coherent fell only 9% between 1969 and 1974, the percentage of the low quality papers fell a full 27%, from 83% judged coherent in 1969 to 56% considered coherent in 1974.¹¹

In determining the direction that a thrust toward basics should take, then, teachers and interested citizens would be wise to heed the advice of W. Ross Winterowd, one of the nation's foremost rhetoricians: "We need to focus on the real basic skills: coherence, development and syntactic fluency."¹²

But enough attention to the "Back-to-Basics" proponents. Let us turn our attention to those who take no genuine interest in the movement, who choose to view it as a parade that will soon pass. To them the following six points may prove useful:

(1) Heading any list of desiderata for those insensitive to social reality must be attitudinal change. If the clamor over basics, including and perhaps especially writing, has any significance at all, it is, certainly, that the society as a whole wants its educational institutions and its educators to alter their priorities--and to do so not reluctantly or grudgingly but happily, in the service of public good. Societal and community needs are not to be denied; they will be met, either by educators who willingly change the nature of their instruction and institutions or by legislators who mandate such change.

Already some from our ranks have voiced appeals for voluntary alteration from within, as opposed to legislated alteration from outside. Consider, for example, Dr. Gail Thain Parker, formerly a teacher of history and literature at Harvard and, later, President of Bennington College, the prestigious liberal arts

college in Vermont. In a recent issue of The Atlantic, in an article carrying an ominous title, "While Alma Mater Burns," she pulls no punches when she calls for "a far-sighted realism among members of faculties and governing boards," and warns that "Legislators, caught between tax-burdened constituents and local chauvinisms, may be better than many educators at making the necessary choices."¹³

English is a marvelously rich and diverse discipline. There will, and should, always be a place--a sizable place--for courses in language and literature in our educational institutions; but there must also be a place--a larger one than in times past--for courses in writing. Accompanying that increase in offerings must be an attitudinal shift on the part of teachers and supervisors, who, in their desire to serve society, welcome opportunities to improve the writing prowess of its citizens.

(2) One of the great goods that can evolve, I believe, from the controversy over basics is a reduction in the size of classes devoted to composition. In all probability, however, it will not be proponents of the movement who bring it about; the impetus will have to come from others, especially educators from all levels who insist at every opportunity and at the top of their lungs that the teaching and learning of composition can best occur in classes no larger than twenty or twenty-five.

Those who argue for such reduction will, perhaps, want to key off the results of a poll conducted in January of 1976 by the National Education Association. At that time 1,600 full-time classroom teachers from across the nation declared "the most critical element" in providing quality education to be not improved discipline or higher salaries but "lower class size."¹⁴ Certainly no part of the curriculum feels the weight of numbers more than does the composition program; and thus members of the English-teaching profession may find it propitious to build on the groundwork provided by the poll, insisting at every turn that if reduction in class size is a concern of all teachers and if, moreover, composition is indeed a national disgrace, then composition teachers deserve smaller classes than do other teachers.

Yet no one should be deluded. Meaningful reduction in the size of composition classes will not come quickly. Nor will it come without sacrifices. Larger literature classes or grammar classes, for example, may well accompany it. But regardless of the disadvantages that may result, there has never been a better time to push for such reduction.

(3) There has never been a better time, either, to press for the creation and use of writing centers in high schools and colleges, facilities as important as, and perhaps even a part of, the reading centers so popular on virtually all campuses. If writing is as significant a weakness as the present clamor suggests, then it surely deserves special supplementary accommodations, just as reading does, facilities supervised not

by people who simply happen to be handy but by adequately paid professionals competent in and committed to the improvement of composition skills.

The centers would house appropriate resources for the teaching and learning of composition, among them, certainly, self-help materials, cassette tapes and players, and study carrels which could double as writing desks. There would be provision, too, for teacher aides--parents and capable students--to assist in the necessary tutoring, as well as for computer instruction to do likewise. Some of the centers would be large and lavish; others, not so--perhaps simply "make do" rooms. All of the centers, however, would share one feature: a commitment to the improvement of writing skills.

A dream, you say? a figment of the imagination, you think? Perhaps not, especially if people within the English-teaching profession clamor as loudly as do the "Basics" people outside it.

(4) It is a superb time, too, for members of the profession, high school and college, to determine whether they truly know what they want and value from their composition students. They just may be confused, suggest some observers, including Dr. Joseph M. Williams, Associate Chairperson of the English Department at the University of Chicago. His recently completed study of the paper-evaluation practices of over seventy teachers, teachers of teachers, and prospective teachers is embarrassingly enlightening. Among its conclusions are the following:

- . A good many teachers implicitly prefer what they explicitly reject. The commonplaces about choosing the short, brisk Anglo-Saxon word over the Latinate, about being direct appear to lack pragmatic support.

- . High school teachers are least able to overcome the effect of a pompous style... Junior college teachers are able to make distinctions more exactly...

- . A good student who follows his teacher's advice about avoiding wordiness will suffer...

- . If what has been described here holds for the teaching of English composition in general, then our profession is contributing to an implicit value system in public discourse that is contrary to much of what we assert is important to preserve: direct, open, honest writing.¹⁵

Hidden in Williams' study is yet another conclusion: those of us who teach composition have little reason for overconfidence or complacency. Although like the woman in the cigarette commercial, "we've come a long way, baby," the road ahead is longer still. There is much that we don't know about the composing

process and about teaching it. Regular self-examination, as well as regular examination of our theories and practices by people outside the profession, can alert us to flaws in our techniques and to possible changes that we might wish to consider.

(5) Dialog among teachers and supervisors at the various levels of Language Arts/English instruction has always been one of the profession's foremost goals. Seldom, however, have time and opportunity allowed for it. Equally important, when groups from the various levels have come together, more often than not the dialogue has hardly been dialogue; rather, it has been one-way communication, with speakers from colleges and universities dominating the sessions. Too frequently representatives from elementary, junior, and senior high schools have traveled to college and university campuses fully, and foolishly, expecting to hear words from the masters. Hats in hand, they have commonly resembled postulants about to be allowed a few moments with the high priests.

The controversy over basics affords an excellent opportunity for true dialog--for real two-way communication--among people working with composition at the various levels of education. I reveal nothing other than a public secret when I disclose that college and university composition teachers can learn an immense amount from their counterparts at the other (I refuse to say "lower") educational levels. Some of the very best instruction in writing, under extremely demanding circumstances, is occurring right now in K-12 classrooms. Conversely--and again I reveal nothing other than a public secret, I realize--some of the least effective instruction in writing is occurring right now in college and university classrooms. Many an instructor (or full professor) is at this very moment hoping, praying, and politicking for the day when he can give his full energies not to the composition sections he is presently teaching but to his real love: literature.

I mean disrespect to no one. And certainly I mean none to my colleagues at the university level, many of whom--hundreds of whom--are committed to composition teaching. Yet in the days ahead there must be more meaningful dialogue within the profession than has occurred in times past. Formally or informally, groups must come together to exchange ideas, to hear and to be heard. Nothing must be taken for granted: all must be seen, and must see themselves, as coequals, both givers and takers. The profession will be the better for it, the society likewise. And the clamor over composition will be just a bit less audible.

(6) That clamor will be reduced even more if the profession, sensitive to social reality, makes bold curricular changes at all levels. In high schools, composition must receive greater emphasis than in the recent past, even if offerings in language and literature suffer. Freshman English in our two-and four-year institutions must once again become composition courses, not mergers (I'm tempted to say "hodge-podges") of composition and literature, or composition and linguistics, or composition and

popular culture. Undergraduate programs in English Education must require courses in both composition and the teaching of composition; and Master's degree programs in the teaching of reading. Candidates for the Ph.D. in English must take courses and have experiences in the teaching of composition; and other universities must emulate the University of Iowa and the University of Southern California, both of which offer doctoral programs emphasizing composition and rhetoric.

Similarly, there must be on-going in-service work. Teachers and supervisors at all levels, including the college and university, must insist on it. The best composition theory and practice must be made available to them through workshops and institutes, national, regional, and local. Just as Language Arts/English personnel take professional pride in staying abreast of best-sellers and developments in prose fiction, poetry, and literary criticism, they must sense the need for comparable knowledge of and insight into such matters as rhetorical theory, hemisphericity, and heuristics. The names and works of people like Winterowd, Macrorie, and Rohman must become as familiar to them as the names and works that dominate the current literary scene. Those same names and works, furthermore, must be seen as just as professionally reputable and significant as any that belles lettres provides.

There are no secrets. Improved composition instruction will become a reality only if there is greater attention to it--and greater respect for it.

Two additional points need to be made, I think, of importance to both proponents and opponents of the "Back-to-Basics" movement; my remarks would be incomplete without them. The first is that, regardless of where we stand on the basics issue, let us not forget our sense of humor, our ability to laugh at the human condition in general and ourselves in particular. It is one of our own, Charles Weingartner, a teacher of English and a teacher of English teachers, a man who has assigned and graded many a batch of compositions, who reminds us that "the cultivation and maintenance of a sense of humor...may just be the most important humanistic objective to work toward--personally and professionally."¹⁶ Thus, when our blood boils because a student just doesn't understand or give a hang about our best composition advice, it might be well to recall the high school writer who, when told that he had a dangling modifier, immediately checked the zipper on his trousers. Or, when we're ready to climb the walls because nothing seems to be working in our writing classes, we might gain solace from recalling the English teacher who dreamed he was teaching composition, only to awaken to find that he was.

I assert, finally, that the solution to the basics problem--and to the nation's writing problem--lies ultimately not in man's mind but in man's heart. With that truth, and with that distinction, I am certain Professor Gauss would wholeheartedly agree.

FOOTNOTES

1. Janet Emig, The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders, Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1976, p. 22.
2. Emig, p. 27.
3. For a full discussion of this point, see R. W. Reising, "Grammar," Creative Approaches to the Teaching of English: Secondary, Itasca, Illinois: Peacock, 1974; or Stephen N. Judy, Explorations in the Teaching of Secondary English, New York: Dodd, Mead, 1974, pp. 37-39.
4. W. Ross Winterowd, lecturer, University of Detroit, June, 1976. See also John C. Mellon, Transformational Sentence-Combining, Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1969, and Frank O'Hare, Sentence Combining, Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1973.
5. Lois V. Arnold, "Writer's Cramp and Eyestrain--Are They Paying Off?" English Journal, 53 (January, 1964), pp. 10-15.
6. Paul B. Diederich, "In Praise of Praise," N.E.A. Journal, 52 (September, 1963), pp. 58-59.
7. James Moffett, "On Language," North Carolina English Teacher, 33 (Winter, 1976), pp. 1-13.
8. Bernard J. McCabe, in George Hillocks, Bernard J. McCabe, and James F. McCampbell, The Dynamics of English Instruction, New York: Random House, 1971, pp. 510-511.
9. George Hillocks, Jr., Alternatives in English: A Critical Appraisal of Elective Programs, Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1972, p. 77.
10. Writing Mechanics, 1969-1974, Washington D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1975, p. 11.
11. Writing Mechanics, 1969-1974, p. 8.
12. W. Ross Winterowd in NAEP Newsletter, (February, 1976), p.3.
13. Gail Thain Parker, "While Alma Mater Burns," The Atlantic, 238 (September, 1976), pp. 39-47.
14. Parade, (January 25, 1976), p. 6.
15. Joseph M. Williams, "Nominal and Verbal Styles: Some Affective Consequences," unpublished paper.
16. Charles Weingartner, "Basic Backwardness," Arizona English Bulletin, 18 (February, 1976), pp. 139-144.

When You Tell Them to Write and They Ask, "Why Bother?"

Michael R. Dressman

On the cover of Newsweek and in the professional journals we have been apprised of the problem. Some have called for us to get "back to basics," and many have had their say on "why Johnny (and Shirley) can't write."

All this roaring over the "literacy crisis" has focused attention on English, language arts, and communications programs at every level. As a result, in many schools there is now a re-emphasis on composition skills. Teachers, armed with a new sense of mission and urgency, have been beefing up the writing components of their courses. But as anyone knows who has confronted students with a composition assignment, there is always a certain measure of resistance.

This resistance will vary with the class and the assignment. Highly motivated, achievement-oriented students may respond with enthusiasm to an assignment to write something as mundane as a description of a photograph, just as they may enthusiastically memorize a list of dates for a history course, simply because that's the kind of people they are. Even when the assignments are good, however, enthusiasm for writing is rare. The majority of students cannot be counted on to spring to conquer an assignment "just because it is there." In fact, getting a student even to turn in a shoddy version of what was asked for is often a major battle.

A student who resists training in composition skills need not be merely lazy. He or she may have a fundamental difficulty which precludes taking the assignment seriously. If the teacher ignores this difficulty, not even the best textbooks or the most interesting topic can shake the student loose and make him or her want to write and write well. This fundamental difficulty of which I write is essentially a question of motivation. The student may not have thought the problem through all the way, but lurking beneath the surface is the simple question, "Why? Why write? Why care about writing?" It is not a bad question, and it is a question which I fear that we seldom address with students. This may be because we teachers of English take for granted that the importance of having a facility with the written language is so clear as to be self-evident.

Given the world in which our students live, as students, the benefits of knowing how to write well are not self-evident. Television, radio, and the telephone are their major means of

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communication with the world not present to them, and their not being able to write in an acceptable manner does not hinder them in using these media. Friends who are far away often now send cassette tapes in place of letters. Jobs they apply for while in school are gotten through personal interviews. Only teachers think it is important for them to write. Writing, therefore, if it is learned at all, is learned as a school skill--but less important and less applicable to their world than other school skills such as learning how to work a locker combination or how to get to the front of the lunch line.

The inapplicability of writing is not a reality, of course; it is truly a matter of perception. Nevertheless, even the student who comes alive to the inherent interest of other subjects, such as chemistry, music, or even literature, may not see the necessity of being able to write anything longer than a note for the milkman unless this necessity is pointed out. It boils down to a matter of self-imaging. Most students do not picture themselves as people who will need to write. The teacher of composition who does not alter this image will continue to find the same mistrustful resistance to assigned work. On the other hand, if the students perceive themselves as people who must write, the battle then shifts from a struggle between the teacher and the students to a questing of the students together with the teacher for a better control over the skills of clear written communication.

But how is this shift to be accomplished? Here are a few steps to follow in trying to help students imagine themselves as writers:

(1) First have the students write something so that there can be a shared experience which can serve as the basis for discussion. But try to make the assignment as easy as possible for them by letting the topic play to their strength. For example, let them tell about something on which they are experts, such as a hobby, a job, a place they have visited, the street where they live, or even some member of their family.

(2) The next class start talking with them about the writing process. Maybe read or have read some of the papers and ask them about how they felt when they knew they had to write something. Likely reactions are panic and pain. Dwell on the reactions and allow for them.

(3) In fact, acknowledge that writing is and always has been a painful process for many people. It is not a "natural" form of communication like conversation; it is a product of civilization and must be learned by participating in a sophisticated society. Admit your own writing problems and fears. (By the way, teachers of writing really ought to do some writing themselves so as not to lose touch with the internal workings of the process. If you like, you yourself might do a rendition of that first assignment you give them.)

(4) The next step need not follow the preceding ones immediately, but within a week or two, perhaps, start a little discussion about the fact that people do write outside of school situations, especially on the job. See how many professions the students can come up with in which writing plays a major part. This can be a very profitable discussion because--despite the fact that they are confronted daily by an avalanche of words in print or over the broadcast media--they very likely seldom consider the fact that someone sat down and wrote all those words they see or hear. They often labor under the delusion that the world of printed and broadcast words is the product of some kind of spontaneous generation. It is a shock for them to realize that someone earns a living writing the stories in comic books or that all those quick-witted remarks by their TV heroes are the result of hours of composing and revising by teams of writers.

To give them an appreciation of the way the written word earns people a living, the teacher could possibly employ writing assignments, films, field trips, and guest speakers. Have the class write a better commercial for some product than some ad they say they hate. Provide them with a film or real life experience of a television newsroom or a newspaper. Invite a professional writer to talk about his or her work.

(5) Less obvious professions, too, often involve a good deal of writing; and you might have the class do a little investigating by sending them out to interview people in various lines. How many of them know how much of a police detective's time is spent writing? How important is it for a pharmacist to write clearly?

You might also point out how the leaders and most influential members of any profession are people who often do a great deal of writing. Doctors, dentists, scientists, lawyers, judges, bankers, and many others not only write on the job, but also contribute articles to professional journals and write speeches for conventions. Of course, the same is true of engineers, labor leaders, automobile dealers, and barbers, among others.

The popular image of the business man or woman is of a person who dictates a letter to a stenographer who then types it up. But ask the student how smart a business person is who then merely signs the resulting letter without checking it over for embarrassing grammatical or mechanical errors.

(6) There has been a movement in many schools to teach practical writing skills such as filling out forms or writing letters. There are even textbooks keyed to those real-life writing situations. But even without such a text or workbook, students can be brought to see the advisability of knowing how to perform such important writing tasks as completing governmental forms, writing to legislators, writing unembarrassing letters to loved ones, or applying in writing for a job. Above all, you can point out that having the versatility to confront different writing situations will make it more possible for a person to

lead a life that is not spent at the mercy of those who can and will take advantage of the individual's inability to express himself or herself on paper.

Being able to write clearly and effectively is in a person's own best interest. Most students are only vaguely aware of this if at all. If courses which stress composition skills are to succeed as courses, students must become aware of the need they have to write beyond the classroom. But, more importantly, if students are to grow into functioning members rather than victims of society, they must be made aware of the importance of gaining a proficiency in writing. If they are not taught to see themselves as people who need to know how to express themselves on paper, they will likely pay a high price for the rest of their lives.

American taxpayers are paying money to support the teaching of writing which no one wants to read. In English classes most students write dead-end themes. The teachers complain about having to read them and the students never pass them around to their fellows except to solicit aid in grammar, punctuation, or spelling.

Ken Macrorie in the Preface to Writing to Be Read (Hayden, 1968)

Writing Needs a Reason

Beverly Haley

Last fall when the school term opened, I invited my students and their parents to a get-acquainted coffee. My ultimate goal was to establish communication lines and the feeling that "We're all in this together." Some of the parent requests for their students in the composition course included things like "Teach them to spell!"; "Teach them the way we were taught when we went to school!"; "Get them ready for college!"; and "Get back to the basics!" The students were not quite so vocal, but among the things they said were "I don't know how to put my thoughts into words!" and "With television and movies, who needs to know how to write except maybe a few experts?" and "I don't know how to organize my thoughts!" (assuming they have thoughts to organize).

Over a dozen years of teaching (or trying to!) writing to teenagers, for me the matter boils down to this: There has to be a Reason to Write!

How many times have you said or heard someone say, "I would have written you a letter, but there wasn't anything to write about." or "I didn't think you'd be interested in what I'm doing right now." Translated, these remarks could possibly mean anything from "It's boring here now." to "If I really told you what I'm doing, you might get mad--or you wouldn't understand or you wouldn't care." Writing letters is something in nearly everyone's life (granted, much more so in some lives than others!)--and if we have trouble in writing to someone we presumably care about and want to share our lives with, then think how much more difficult and threatening it is to write A Class Assignment!

It seems to me that as teachers of English we have to accept the fact that, at best, we're working almost always on a kind of artificial rather than a real level with our classes. For instance, when a student comes to my English class from an auto-mechanics or electronics or home economics or art class where he or she has been Doing Something and has a Product to show for it, then what I have to offer loses all sense of immediacy, of something tangible, of something usable.

Another condition that often seems insurmountable to me as a high school English teacher is that I get all kinds of students. Some have almost no verbal skills, have no intention of taking further schooling, and are simply "putting in time" until high school graduation--if both they and the school endure that long. At the other extreme, of course, are the highly self-motivated students with well-developed verbal skills and top academic aspirations.

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With a majority of students, two things are involved in getting a writing program off the ground: 1) Students need to write about something they care about--they write, in other words, because they have something they want to or must say! and 2) They need to feel that someone besides the teacher is listening to what they have to say--at least part of the time.

The biggest obstacles to writing--even when students are motivated to write--are a fear (of one or many things) of writing, weakness in writing skills, and--because they are young--a lack of background of experiences for formulating ideas and feelings about themselves and the way they react to the world around them.

To alleviate these obstacles and to get into the process of writing, you can use a variety of approaches. Take the fear factor first. There are many ways you can confront this problem without the fear of your losing a handle on discipline. The key prerequisites are your attitude (try to be non-judgmental, accepting without being dishonest, and be respectful toward each person) and your organization. The chemistry of each class is unique and must be dealt with in varying degrees of tight or relaxed methods. Use your common sense and remember that your survival is the number one priority!

If you are enthusiastic about writing and write regularly yourself, this is bound to be contagious to your students. If you are not enthusiastic, consider another profession.

Writing something of a personal nature can be very threatening for some students, so it's best to stick with writing about something or someone else. Start with a poem, a short story, or a current popular song lyric--or make it a recent letter-to-the-editor on a local issue. Make it something you think can't miss in getting the students excited. Try to make them back heads over it. When you reach a peak of controversy in classroom discussion over your topic, when everyone seems to want to get his "two cents worth" in, then it's time to stop talking and start writing.

Ask the students to write down a point of view on the story/poem/song/editorial and to cite words, phrases, ideas from it to support their point of view. If they can then relate this textual evidence to their own experiences and/or to other things they've read or heard, those comments can be added. I like to ask students first to make a statement about their topic--then jot down everything they can find or think of that supports, illustrates, amplifies, or explains that statement. The next step is to look at what they've written down and formulate a way to organize these things into a beginning, a middle, and an end. Then I ask them to do a first writing. Let it "cool" several hours or a couple of days. Read it aloud. Any places that don't read smoothly need revision. There may be other places in the writing that they now can see with their "cold eye" where they could make a more exact word choice or a more graphic phrase or

where "dead wood" needs to be extracted--or maybe they've left out something important to the whole meaning of mood. Next it's time for the re-write or re-writes.

Another way to get the writing class underway is to have students pair off for interviews. Each interviews the other. This works best using students who don't know each other at all or only slightly, but any type of pairing should work in some way. Ask the students to "break the ice" in their interviews by asking standard questions about family, hobbies, favorite school subjects, and the like. They are not to use all this information in their written biographical sketch but instead are to choose one thing on which to focus. This could be something unusual or interesting or outstanding about the person--or it could be the one characteristic that most distinguishes that student's personality. The sketch is to be no more than one page in length and must be interesting enough to read aloud to the whole class for their enjoyment! Some of the final copies could be posted on the bulletin board along with a snapshot of the person interviewed, or all the sketches could be posted, a few at a time, on a rotating basis. Some might be read aloud to the class by the author, the teacher, or a person in the class who reads well. A dittoed pamphlet of the sketches of the whole class could be stapled together so each student would have his or her copy of "Portraits of Sixth Hour Composition Class, 1977-78" or whatever title they want for their collection.

My composition class members keep folders of their work in the room. Once each quarter we put together a "class magazine." Different people volunteer to be "editors" for each edition and the rest of the class submits writings from their folders or journals or writing they've done on their own. The editors select what they want to use (with an effort to have at least one thing from each person in the class) and the order of the arrangement, assign typists to make ditto masters, and put proofreaders and collaters to work. Class artists enjoy drawing illustrations and the cover design. Each class runs off enough copies to exchange with the other class sections.

Doing a publication has many benefits besides making students very much aware of their own writing, the writing of their classmates, and of writing in general. It is one way of writing for an audience--and there's no audience more critical or appreciative than their own peers--and it gives the students a product that can be kept as long as each one cares to keep it. Because they are writing to get enough material that is of high enough quality to "print," the students are writing regularly and often and sharpening their skills with each piece of material.

Although all of your assignments in writing can't or shouldn't be for an audience, try to take advantage of or make as many opportunities of this kind as you can. Write letters-to-editors of newspapers and magazines, write to radio or television stations, to senators and representatives; write articles to submit to the school paper or literary magazine; write for contests.

A couple of years ago, one of my classes detected an error in literary interpretation in a commercial filmstrip we were viewing. The class composed a letter to mail to the company and within two weeks received a reply from the company's president with his compliments on their astuteness, his apology, and his promise to make the correction in a revised filmstrip. That was exciting!

The point is that if someone listens to you, then there is a reason to write and write with clarity, accuracy, and a pleasing style. Writing suddenly takes on a reason for being, and students see that writing does have meaning and power. They realize that that power must be treated with care and respect, for the consequences may be immeasurably good or evil. There's fear in that, I assure you, but it's a healthy, exciting kind of fear because you're doing something you believe in and something you feel you must do!

When students care about what they write--when they are writing for a real reason (and there are many, including getting ready to write for college classes)--then you as the teacher have "released" them to writing.

Oh, yes! An interesting thing happened at the end of that parent-student get-acquainted party of mine last fall. At the close of our evening's discussion, I handed out half-sheets of paper and asked each parent and student to write down what they wanted most to happen with the students' writing by the end of the course. The students immediately began to write; but the parents sat paralyzed by the blank sheet of paper and the ball point pen!

...If you are writing without zest,
without gusto, without love, without fun,
you are only half a writer...For the first
thing a writer should be is--excited. He
should be a thing of fevers and enthusiasms.

Ray Bradbury from Zen and the Art
of Writing, (Capra Press,
1973), pp. 28-29.

Talking and Writing

J. A. Boettcher

"The only creative writing I could do was write anonymous letters to the Student Council suggestion box."

Paula Danziger from
The Cat Ate My Gymsuit

Writing in general is becoming a lost art--not only creative writing, but also the ordinary kind of writing such as thank you notes and informational notes. Students and people in general prefer the living, animate language of conversation to the often lifeless, frozen appearance of written words. Such words seem dull and spiritless stripped of the speaker's intonation and non-verbal cues. Students are comfortable when writing their names, circling true-false items or checking multiple choice answers. More writing than this is viewed as a frightening, arduous, self-revealing chore to be avoided at all costs. Even students who enjoy and appreciate the language of books become almost comatose at the thought of writing a report or, that horror of high school English, an autobiography. Students, readily perceiving the awesome power of an autobiography to reveal their inner self, fear rejection and misunderstanding. They know too, that it requires a skillful writer to capture the ever-changing facets of a human person.

Given this general feeling of inadequacy and fear towards writing, what approaches are open to reading and English teachers who must deal to some degree with this present human reluctance to put pencil to paper and write?

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN TALKING AND WRITING

One philosophy of writing that provides an explosion of exciting possibilities utilizes the interrelationship of writing with other forms of communication. This philosophy views writing as an activity intimately related to the enjoyment of talking, sharing, and communicating thoughts, ideas, and feelings.

Stressing this interrelationship in the classroom can be easy and productive. Bulletin boards can be displayed with newspaper and magazine reviews of new, popular, or revived T.V. programs. These reviews can be viewed as part of a natural sharing process that friends do each day. Students' interests in songs, movies, and T.V. programs can serve as springboards to classroom dis-

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cussion and writing. The use of specialty magazines such as Bike World and CB News can help emphasize that all talking and writing is for people who have common interests to share. Discussion of talking and writing considerations such as audience factors, speaker's (or writer's) background, and purpose are natural outgrowths of the shared interests of these specialty magazines.

Students who have difficulty reading, such as those in reading classes, may need more direct help in discovering the close relationship of writing to other forms of communication. The basic approach mentioned above can be adapted. Instead of using regular magazines, the Know Your World and You and Your World newspapers can be used. T.V. and movie reviews are provided as regular features in these publications. A reading and verbal discussion of a T.V. program can be followed by writing--possibly only a one-liner similar to book or movie blurbs. Many problems of spelling and mechanics will be avoided as most of the vocabulary will be available in the article. Problems of lack of response or feeling can be avoided if the topic or program is of general interest to the students. A ready supply of interesting adjectives can be provided in a non-threatening acceptable manner by means of a brainstorming oral vocabulary session. Students can toss out words or adjectives they might like to use in their evaluation or response, and the teacher, or a willing student, can write them on the board. (This can build up reading sight vocabulary at the same time.) Words such as "groovy," "great," and "gripping" or "humorous," "funny," and "bone-tickling" can be culled or underlined from other reviews. Students, however, are marvelously skilled at this kind of word play and have large stores of untapped--for writing--verbal resources.

After students compose their one-liners on Charlie's Angels, for example, they can either type them or print them on tag-board. Then, along with a picture of the cast--"Voila," a new bulletin board display has been born that can be read by all.

ADDITIONAL CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND IDEAS

Newspaper writing has long been a popular means of approaching writing activities. It is a very factual approach, stressing the communication of something that has happened. An interesting twist to this approach is to take a famous tale such as Frankenstein or popular movie such as Star Wars and write the plot as a news short. This could easily lend itself to a small group activity preceded by review reading and verbal discussion.

Small group writing or pair writing offers a nice combination of talking and writing. Two or three students can work together to write a poem, a movie review, or a news short. Structure is essential to the success of this group writing, both in terms of time and purpose. A good initial way to begin is through the use of Moffett's Interaction cards. Language experience has also been widely used to stress the relationship of communication skills. The stress and focus has usually been on what the student has done, or where the student has gone. An extension of this method can be called language experience using inner experience.

In this experience approach, students can be encouraged to write about how they feel...about doing chores, about cloudy days, or about writing stupid paragraphs about how they feel.

When students feel a need to do some writing, interesting things result. One seventh-grade boy Michael in a reading-tutoring program wanted to improve his writing skills. He knew he had great difficulty expressing himself and spelling simple words and consequently felt very inadequate in this area. He responded readily to the idea of a personal journal--which I conceived as a kind of personal diary. However, as Michael saw his thoughts and activities take shape and form, he was very proud of his accomplishment and anxious to share with both his tutor and me.

Another student in the tutoring program, a sixth-grader named Steve, needed to write a short story for a project in his open-school program, but was at a loss how to begin. With the help of his tutor, Steve wrote an exciting three paragraphs on a baseball game his team had just played. The ideas and words were Steve's own, but he needed encouragement and acceptance of his skills. He did not need idea help; he had lots of good ideas.

DEALING WITH FEEDBACK AND MECHANICS

A pervasive argument proffered by English teachers for not including writing opportunities in their classes is the gargantuan, time-consuming task of reading and providing feedback on such written assignments. A beautifully oversimplified solution is "Don't do it." A reasonable follow-up question then is, "Who should do it?" Occasionally, as in the one-liner example above, no additional feedback is necessary. For other written activities, why not let those most intimately concerned--the students--do it? Although I can picture eyes opened wide in disbelief and hear the uproar of dissent at this idea, I will press on. Although imaginative teachers can already think of ways to exploit this idea, I offer the following suggestions:

Pair up the students. Allow time for each student to read and share the content and help check mechanics and spelling. Encourage use of a range of dictionaries and phonetic spelling as a base. Even the worst writer/speller will have content to share. If desired, needed vocabulary words can be put on the board.

Use small groups. Proceed in essentially the same manner as above.

James Moffett suggested almost ten years ago that "young people are most interested in writing for their peers." Appeal to the natural sharing purpose of communication also suggests that students will enjoy writing-to-be-shared more than writing-to-be-graded. Following the pair or small-group feedback, additional whole-group sharing may be indicated. (Read Peer-mediated Instruction by Peter Rosenbaum for additional aids on structuring pair teamwork.)

To summarize, the key to developing writing skills in all students is to use all the resources in the classroom. Students' ideas, interests, and even limitations provide untapped and unmined resources.

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Good writing does not come from hard work alone nor from some distant muse but from "a combination of serendipity and precision."

. . .

"Art is a way of making insanity useful."

John Ciardi

Exercises In Ideational Fluency, Or Being Creative in the Midst of the Back-to-Basics Movement

Harriet Marriner

In an effort to determine whether students can consciously improve their creative thinking abilities, I initiated a once-a-week program of exercises in ideational fluency, tasks in which students would attempt to write as many ideas on a given topic as they could think of in a prescribed time. The time limit was between five and ten minutes for these students in tenth-grade advanced English. The program was a casual one, rather than academic, because I was interested in my students' performance rather than in a careful research study. I had help in compiling the data from my student aide, Staci Matteson, and in interpreting the results from Dr. Leif Fearn of San Diego State University.

QUESTIONS GENERATING IDEATIONAL FLUENCY

- What can you do with a ketchup bottle cap?
- What can you do with a brick?
- Who discovered blue?
- What would happen if rain came from trees?
- What else can buttons be made of?
- What things are there four of?
- What things are red?
- What can you do with pockets?
- What else can you do with Christmas tree ornaments?
- What else could Oedipus Rex be called?
- What else could you have been?
- What things can you do with a rubber band?
- What does sorrow look like?
- What if all the green things you know became blue?
- What new lifestyles do you predict for the year 2001?

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What does music look like?

What can you do with fog?

What can you do with a shamrock?

Why are mosquitoes beautiful animals?

What does creativity look like?

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Many students did especially well in these exercises. Their answers ranged from the very practical to the extremely humorous. They showed great flexibility in their answers, not staying with one idea, but thinking instead of many possibilities. At the beginning of the program, the responses were not nearly as numerous as they were a few weeks later. Gradually, as the exercises continued, the students would discuss among themselves the number of responses they had made, comparing them with each other and with their previous week's efforts. One thing that particularly seemed to aid them was to hear me read some sample responses. The best ones of these were verbally rewarded, and it appeared as if a certain status was achieved if one's efforts were appreciated by the rest of the class.

SAMPLE RESPONSES

Ketchup bottle cap: throw sunflower seeds in for a game,
a small shot glass, catch a bug underneath, a fly's
bathtub, hat of a tiny tin man

Red Things: Satan's eyes, freckles, Dracula's teeth,
Cincinnati Reds

Brick: hollow it out and use it as a shoe, a gift for
someone weird, build another Great Wall of China

Discoverer of blue: was born on Monday at sea in the
rain, a cry baby, can wiggle his blue ears

Things in fours: hairs on Kojak's head, nervous parents
at a wedding

What else you could be: an electrician but my circuits
ran short, a window but I couldn't stand the pane, a
nun but I broke the habit, a light but the idea didn't
turn me on

Rubber band: cut off your little sister's circulation,
write a song about one ("Rubber Band Man"), a conveyor
belt for ants, use a big one as a hula hoop

Shamrock: an Adam and Eve costume, dye it purple, take it
out to dinner, a Sham-"rock" singing group, tickle an

elf with one, smoke it, shove it down a leprechaun's throat until he tells you where the gold is hidden

2001: dried flowers will be displayed in museums, pictures of unpopulated areas will be priceless commodities, teachers will be obsolete, people will develop gills and live under water, pet rocks will live in glass houses

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Most of the people who participated did improve from one activity to the next. Also, the range of thinking increased; people thought more, and thought faster, about what they were writing. Students wanted to think of something that no one else would think of. As one person stated, "I really think this exercise was helpful to everyone; I know it was for me. Being able to generate ideas quickly proves helpful often. Even in just small areas, creativity seems to prevail. Increasing creativity can only be good for the mind. Also, it is fun, and people look forward to hearing other people's responses."

Occasionally a week would go by during which there were so many things to do that the ideational fluency assignment got postponed. This resulted in quite a bit of disappointment among the class members, along with a desire to do two the following week to "make up" the missed one.

All of the students added the terms "ideationally fluent," "divergent production," and "risk-taking" to their vocabularies. But they gained more than that. One student said, "Sometimes I have a hard time thinking of what to write on an essay test-- these exercises help me to come up with an idea faster so I have more time to write the paper." Nearly all of the students perceived an improvement in the use of their imagination. They felt that they were able to generate ideas faster. I have no way to judge whether this is actually so, but if their self-perceptions have been heightened in any way by these exercises, then I feel they have been worthwhile.

Locating Real Writing Audiences

Ralph L. Corrigan, Jr.

Thirty-odd students crouched over papers on their desks are busily writing their hearts out. From time to time they turn to one another seeking advice or asking pointed questions, and occasionally they call upon the instructor's expertise to settle a particularly demanding problem. Something live and real is happening in this classroom. The students are writing, and they love it.

In the face of the current media-blitz announcing the atrocious quality of writing at all levels, and a finger-wagging crusade at English teachers blaming them for the lackluster state of the written word, it is heartening to know that writing classes like the one described above still exist. Because those media folk are pretty much on target. Certainly, in the majority of writing classes in elementary school, high school, and college, students often learn little or nothing (except what they are doing wrong), and the teacher burns far too much midnight oil correcting the same tiresome writing errors. So the perennial questions remain: How can I coerce students one more time to put themselves on paper? How can I avoid the paper-editing syndrome and motivate students to assume this responsibility? And how can I be sure the writing experience has real learning value?

At least partial answers to such troublesome questions lie in a re-thinking of the writing event. For example, the writer-subject-audience triad remains painfully static in the average classroom. Writer is student; subject is most often handed down by teacher; and audience is teacher (and sometimes class). What about other possibilities within the triad?

The student always functions as writer, so the first part of the triad stays put. The second part, the subject, is either dictated by the teacher or discovered by the student. But the possibilities in the third part of the triad, the audience, are unlimited. Traditionally, student compositions rarely travel beyond the classroom; either the teacher or, in isolated instances, the classmates act as the principal audiences. Which brings up the logical question--why? Or to rephrase the question: why not write for a real audience?

Locating a real audience (here defined as a live audience outside the school) dramatically alters the dynamics of the writing class. Students quickly recognize and respond to dis-

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tinctions between writing for teachers and writing that moves out of the classroom. Suddenly the emphasis shifts from fighting for grades on compositions, to an interest in communicating ideas simply and precisely. And suddenly too, the teacher's role is reversed. The old red-ink syndrome is happily discarded in favor of the more positive and natural role of the teacher as guide and helper.

BASIC APPROACH TO REAL AUDIENCE WRITING

The basic approach to a real audience writing exercise will vary slightly, depending on the specific audience (see other suggestions at the end of article). But for starters, a letter to a person in the news offers a general overview of the process.

1. Finding a newspaper story. As part of a class experiment, students read a newspaper over the weekend and bring to Monday's class an article that caught their fancy. To cover for those souls who will forget, the teacher arrives Monday morning equipped with a healthy supply of suitable articles gleaned from the papers.

2. Locating a real audience. So far student interest runs high because they don't know what to expect next. Now comes the crunch--when the teacher says they are to write a letter to a person in their newspaper article. To keep the fires burning, special stress must be placed on the "experimental" nature of the exercise.

The shock waves generated by such a bizarre announcement, and the novelty of the idea provide the teacher with sufficient leverage to turn directly to suggestions for the letters' contents. For example, the opening paragraph identifies when and in what publication the student read the article, then eases into the next part of the letter with a positive statement about the person. In the middle section, the student shares ideas, voices concerns, and requests more specific information. And finally, the last paragraph thanks the person for reading the letter, and ends with a courteous request for a reply. Length for the student letter is left open, but the 200 to 400 word range is about right.

3. Stressing basic ideas. Next comes a set of strictures designed to promote the students' best writing efforts. The teacher cautions the class: a) to adopt the role of private citizens rather than students (which enhances the "real" quality of the assignment); b) to write substantive letters that will not waste the addressees' time; c) to remember writing communicates more than just ideas: it speaks clearly about the writer as person--so the letters should reflect the students to advantage; d) to understand that letters sent through the mails become public documents (which means the writers bear direct responsibility for what they say).

The next step must be skipped the first time around. But after accumulating a file of audience responses, read the class a few of the most dramatic letters. One such letter in my files, from a Chicago policeman, runs eight handwritten pages, and never fails to elicit strong reactions from students.

4. Writing the rough draft. Now students begin writing the rough draft of their letters. The class switches to a writing workshop, and the teacher moves from student to student, supporting the in-class writing atmosphere and fielding questions. Initially, students want to know who to write to, and where addresses can be found. Usually a close reading of the article provides all such information (but sometimes letters must be forwarded in care of an organization or agency or, as a last resort, to the publication's editor).

Time spent on these first rough drafts will vary according to the students' abilities. For example, I press college freshmen to complete a first rough draft by the end of the first class period. Stragglers are advised to finish their rough drafts before the next class meeting.

5. Editing the letters. Next the students edit each other's letters. The most constructive editing efforts occur in groups of threes, with each student preparing two copies of his rough draft letter. Then two student-editors work simultaneously for ten minutes on a letter, while the author listens to their recommendations. This configuration promotes a sense of group activity--and some lively debates.

The teacher does no formal editing, which places the responsibility for editing where it belongs--in the hands of the student writers. As a result, the teacher adopts the more supportive role of resource person. And in editing sessions students ask specific and direct questions: Which choice of words works best? Which sentence structure is clearer and more emphatic? And why?

To encourage the participation of the entire class, with each student working at his level of competency, the teacher lists the editing chores on the board, starting with the simplest and moving toward the more complex. My list includes a) circling spelling errors, b) deleting unnecessary words, c) circling punctuation mistakes, d) evaluating sentence structures and suggesting alternatives, e) commenting on paragraph unity and coherence.

Once the letters have been edited, the students review all the recommendations of their classmates and come to the next class prepared to write their final drafts.

6. Writing the final draft. The final draft is written in class. Then the letters are placed in stamped, addressed envelopes and left unsealed (which allows for the grading of the final products). Finally the teacher mails the letters, and the anxious waiting for responses begins.

OTHER REAL WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

The same general procedures are followed with these assignments, except the students must discover the topics to be written about.

Letter to the Editor. Here is a writing assignment with a built-in sense of the dramatic: the writer sees himself in print (most often for the first time) and experiences a tremendous sense of pride and accomplishment. But there is a "catch" to this assignment: do not enrage the editor of the local paper by deluging him with thirty or more letters at once. If the bulk of the letters are to be sent to the same publication, forward a few at a time over a period of weeks.

Letter to Local Official. This assignment plays up the role of the student as an active member of the community. Letters draw an official's attention to some necessary action (erecting traffic signals, building youth centers, organizing task forces to accomplish a particular goal, etc.). The special value of this exercise is that the student comes face to face with the naked power of the written word. No amount of preaching the value of writing comes close to the electrifying effect of a quick response to a letter, followed by some concrete action by an elected official.

Letter to State or National Official or Government Agency. This variation on the above finds students airing views on subjects of concern and seeking further information. As expected, audience response to this assignment is usually a letter from the office staff of the official or agency, followed by reams of printed matter.

The above is meant as a partial listing of possible "real" audience writing exercises. The resourceful writing teacher inevitably will recognize other possibilities--including variations of the pen pal concept, feature stories for local newspapers, and many others. But regardless of the audience, such exercises thrust students into situations where writing carries consequences. Real audience assignments, besides supplying hefty chunks of built-in motivation, steer students away from anxiety over grades to a healthy concern for writing that is simple, clear and precise. And that seems to be a reasonable goal for a writing unit.

My Battle Against Computer Card Compositions

Joyce Gilday Don

If there is a single sentence guaranteed to elicit moans and groans in unison from any class I teach, it is, "Now for tonight's writing assignment." The same students who have just participated in a lively discussion of a novel or play will often sit staring blankly at the paper before them when asked to comment on the same work on paper.

Obviously writing to them is not a comfortable activity much less a satisfying one. On the other hand, today's students, given a little encouragement, will express their ideas with considerable fluency and originality in any oral form I suggest. This is really not at all surprising in a world where increasingly the ability to fill out forms is the only form of writing required. These are the students who have been encouraged via television ads to call and thank Grandma the moment the gift arrives. (Only a cheapskate would choose the slower method of a thank you note.) Love letters are outdated when one can say it all on a Speidel band. Even parents seem to have accepted the inevitable and send their youngsters off to camp armed with pre-printed postcards which open with "Dear Folks" close with "Love" and require only that the child check off the comments which apply. ("The food here is great, fair, terrible. My counselor is terrific, not bad, a monster.")

Should I then give up and have them bubble in their reactions to literature and life on a computer card? I'm not ready to give in yet; so I'll keep on trying to make writing seem to students what it seems to me to be: conversation on paper.

The following is a description of some of the techniques I have used in one particular course, an elective dealing primarily with literature, open to college bound juniors and seniors. The title of the course is STUDIES IN SENSITIVITY AND ABSURDITY, and we read works by J. D. Salinger, John Updike, Albert Camus and Edward Albee, as well as experiencing a number of exercises in greater self-awareness.

Since one of their reasons for reluctance to say on paper the same thing they will gladly express in class in the fear of making mistakes, I begin the course with an assignment in which mistakes don't count. I ask that for the first few weeks of class they keep a small notebook labeled Reaction Log in which they may talk about their reaction to a story we read, disagree with my interpretation or that of someone else in class, talk about how they feel about the class in general, or raise a

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question about something which they did not understand. They also comment on their reactions to sensitivity exercises. For example, a typical exercise which I use in the first week of the course is to ask that they spend the period interviewing two other students with the task of finding at least two topics on which they agree. In the log the student would discuss what he or she learned about the students interviewed and how they felt while doing the assignment. The students gets an A simply for turning in the log once a week. I make no mechanical corrections, but I do write answers to questions they raise and respond to their comments on the class. We now have a conversation going.

Since I have found that getting started is the most difficult part of writing for many, I ease them into my first literary assignment this way. We have just read The Stranger by Camus and have discussed at length the nature of the main character and his views on life. However, many of the students are bothered by his rather calm acceptance of death at the end of the novel, so at the beginning of the class I pass out a ditto with the following statement, "You sit in your hot jailcell listening to the footsteps echoing down the long corridor. It is nearly dawn. Are they approaching your cell? Will this be the morning they come for you, take you from the cell and execute you? If only you had one more chance to speak to Marie, your love, what would you say?" Immediately the conversation begins, with everyone wanting to have a say, but after only a few responses, I frustrate the class by saying that they can't say anything else orally but instead must write the letter to Marie that Paul would have written in that last few moments. They write busily until the bell rings, and then I ask that they now take the papers home and recopy them, making them as correct as possible. Now that the excitement of having something meaningful to say has carried them well into the assignment, the emphasis on proper form is simply a task and not a stumbling block that gets in the way of communication.

The next two assignments both involve written conversation in the form of dialogue. The first is the reaction to Edward Albee's Zoo Story. We have just finished reading the play, and I begin with the question, "How do you think Peter will feel about killing Jerry when he has time to think about it?" After a few reactions have been given I say, "I wonder if he would try to tell someone about it, maybe someone with whom he works. Just imagine that he gets to work Monday morning and sees a guy he usually eats lunch with. He hesitates a minute and then says, 'John, could I talk to you for a moment?' I want you to write the rest of the conversation as you think it might take place." Again the papers are begun in class and finished at home. Frequently I have students take turns acting out the epilogues in class the next day.

The second is an introduction to two other plays by Albee, The Sandbox and The American Dream. I begin class by asking whether any of them has grandparents living with them and what

advantages and disadvantages this situation has. Usually only a very few students have ever experienced this. I then say that we are going to read two plays dealing with the problems of being old and unwanted and ask them to consider the following situation: "You have been married for three months and are living in a small apartment when your husband comes down to breakfast one morning and says, 'Honey, you know how depressed my mother has been since Dad died. Well, I was thinking of asking her to come and live with us for a while. What do you think?'" I ask that they write the conversation as they believe it would go if they were the husband or wife involved.

Not all of my writing assignments relate to literature. Many come out of some sensitivity exercise we have done. The following is stimulated by an exercise suggested by Dr. Sidney Simon in his book Meeting Yourself Halfway. In this exercise the student is given a ditto sheet with a large circle on it. He is told that the circle represents a typical twenty-four hours in his life and is asked to divide this "pie of life" into various segments which represent time spent in school, with friends, with family, at work, alone, and in sleep. He is then asked to evaluate how he feels about the balance of these segments and what could be done to improve the balance. My assignment for that night is to make up a pie. This one is to represent an absolutely ideal day. It may be a memory of the way a particularly happy day was spent or a kind of fantasy day. In class the next day I allow some time for them to compare perfect days with each other and then I say, "Now relax and shut your eyes and think about the very best few hours of that wonderful day. Think about what the weather will be like, who will be with you, what clothing you will wear, what you will eat and drink, what smells will be in the air." After allowing five minutes for this evocation I ask that they write for me what they just pictured. The assignment is begun in class and finished at home, and the wealth of beautiful, specific, and sensual detail with which they describe their experience is astounding. Best of all many of them say as they hand in these papers, "That was kind of fun." "I really liked doing this." "I hope you enjoy my day as much as I did." I do enjoy their days, and most of all I enjoy sharing with them the pleasure of conversation on paper.

Some Recommendations from the Perspective of the British Middle School

Gerald T. Gregory

In offering some suggestions for helping students develop as writers I have decided to restrict myself to two areas: motivating the reluctant writer and teaching information and skills in attractive and novel ways. I have in mind students of roughly nine to thirteen, though I have found most of the following approaches useful with older students, some of them in teacher education.

A word about what I shall not have time to do. First, I shall not discuss the root difficulties in writing that probably all children face--to do, no doubt, with writing involving a second degree of symbolization (where speech is the first) and, unlike speech, without an interlocutor. Second, though I shall touch on the question of audience I shall not rehearse the (admittedly very important) arguments that writing is not of one sort but many: for example, personal, impersonal, imaginative, objective, subjective, expressive, transactional, poetic, declarative, manipulatory etc., etc.--new terms are spawned almost daily. Third, I shall not argue the case for the intrinsic and extrinsic importance of developing writing competencies, though I expect there is a fringe voicing doubts over that as there is over the importance of reading.

MOTIVATING THE RELUCTANT WRITER

It helps if before writing students explore experiences, issues, etc. in terms as concrete as possible. In this respect talk is valuable as a starting point establishing partial control over subject matter before writing starts. Establish for whom the student is writing, and over the weeks make the audiences as varied as possible. Far too much writing is for your eyes only. Stories, in particular, should often be for fellow students--and, where there are good duplicating facilities and an energetic teacher, students' stories should be distributed as widely, especially among age-peers, as possible. In respect of stories a pertinent point was made to me recently by one of my student teachers. Students are often expected to produce a staggering number of stories. How many, she wondered, had I written lately? A good point, and it leads me to my next. Where possible write with the group. This can remind you of problems which might just have receded since you last tackled

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such a task; sharing with students what you produce can provide stimulus or reassurance, or both.

Try to provide a plausible reason for writing--as opposed, say, to talking. Book reviews may well be more forthcoming if they are requested as guides-to-the-class-library to be used by your group next year. Or if letter writing skills and formulae are being taught, get students actually to write someone about something. A group outing has been proposed? Sharing responsibility for planning it, someone writes off for information about transport costs, journey timings, etc., or as part of a project, somebody writes to a celebrity: what are your views on A, B, and C? Would you fill in this questionnaire? May I come with a tape recorder and interview you? (One teacher has based virtually all of a year's work on such interviews: writing off, conducting and transcribing them, etc.).¹

One way of organising your thinking about setting writing tasks is for you to see some as having a (principally) formal starting point, while others--probably the great majority--will stress content. With very young children you stress form when for example you get them to draw round their outspread hands and to write about hands ("Hands can love and hands can hate...") in the resultant shape, or when you invite them to make a poem in ² which each line conforms to a formula (e.g. contains a colour).

Many teachers are keen to get their students writing poetry. This is admirable, but a path strewn with stumbling blocks. For poetry: it involves thinking hard about how to say things, shaping, reshaping, and compressing--producing a comely object in words as well as saying something. Against: it is all too often prose chopped up into short lines, or because so many students believe poetry means regular rhyme and metrical schemes, doggerel. If free verse is used as an introduction to writing poetry it should be stressed that to be effective it must involve as much writing discipline as any other kind. For example lines must begin and end where they do for sound reasons to do with meaning and which become clear in reading aloud. Or perhaps the visual impact is important. In fact, a useful way into writing poetry--and exploiting a delight in words, their shapes and combinations which all poets need--is to get students to play around with words, perhaps writing them in such ways as to reinforce their meanings (for example L O N G). From there they can move to pattern poetry--where the pattern on the page contributes to the meaning and impact of the poem (for example, a poem about My Cat forming the shape of a cat). A look at "Easter Wings" by George Herbert and the work of Apollinaire may suggest more sophisticated developments. A relatively simple format is that of the haiku (three lines with five, seven, and five syllables respectively). Students can often gain enjoyment and early success with haiku before essaying more difficult "kinds." Later assignments might include producing something in ballad form or, say, after the fashion of W. H. Auden's "Roman Wall Blues," opening up rich possibilities of pastiche work--enjoyable and valuable for its own sake and as a part of studying literature.

Much more often your starting point will be content. It will be writing particularly about something rather than in any particular way, emphasis on what rather than how. Clearly the most important writing a student can do is of the kind he wants to do irrespective of you and your course requirements. However, the reluctant writer is rarely in this position. Most often there is nothing he is conscious of wanting to write. So, given the importance and value of writing, you will need to provide stimulation. Presenting a stimulus for writing has been in recent years a strategy whose popularity can be seen in the amount of stimulus material commercially produced. But a few warnings are in order. 1) Don't overdo it. Many teachers, like the hobo in the Punch razor blade ad, having used it once will use no other. This gives rise to the unconscious assumption of a simple S/R bond, felt to account for how writing, in school at least, occurs. 2) Do not omit the crucial talk stage before writing--though there is clearly room for occasional sessions when students write freely (sometimes in a sort of free association exercise) after encountering the stimulus and with nothing or nobody intervening. 3) Except in such cases make clear the writing task or range of tasks students can choose from on a given occasion. 4) If you are staging a preliminary discussion, analyse (a) its objectives--distinguishing, for example, between analysis of the stimulus and encouragement of responses to it; (b) your role as chairperson (neutral?); (c) who is/is not contributing--and the relationship between discussion and subsequent writing.

It is well worth ringing the changes of kinds of stimulus material. Apart from the traditional use of stories, poems, newspaper cuttings, etc. there is much to be gained from using pictures. Forage for, collect, and hoard promising pictures; there are rich deposits in colour supplements, for example. Stick them on a card, cover with a sheet of Coverlon or similar plasticized material and they last indefinitely, surviving being passed from hand to grubby hand. Again, there is much to be said for photographing (well!) the physical environment the students know well, and in a sense presenting this environment back to them, mediated and focussed. Short films, film loops (for example those made for science teaching, perhaps featuring insects in close-up), slides (for example of different hands--old, young, gnarled, smooth, black, white, clenched, supplicatory) and overhead projector transparencies can all be useful. Sound stimulus can include music and interesting environmental sounds (rail station, seashore, kitchen). These are not difficult to record or even to produce. (Did you know that to get footsteps in the snow you crush a bag of flour rhythmically in front of the microphone?) Many useful sounds are available on sound effect records.

Apart from sight and sound stimulus other types can exploit other senses. An orderly scheme of lessons based on the senses can perhaps serve to refine sense awareness as well as stimulate writing.³ You can even use yourself as a stimulus. There was a recent vogue for this (student-teachers leaping into classrooms blacked up as miners or attired as lifeboatmen, for example) as

there was for using other kinds of spectacle (breaking or burning things). Used well such approaches can be very effective starting points. The changing weather can always be exploited as something to talk and write about. For example an actual storm could be compared with a fictional storm (perhaps the one in David Copperfield, Ch. 55) and some descriptive writing could follow, perhaps as part of a story, or featuring an old salt as first person narrator. But my earlier warning needs repeating: don't overdo it. Consider a conversation reported to me a year or two ago. The scene: a foggy morning in the rush hour. Mother is driving daughter (aged eight) to school, fuming at fog and traffic and their lateness.

Daughter: It's all right for you, mummy. At least when we get there you don't have to do creative writing about it.

I am especially interested in the promotion of visual and audio-visual "literacy." This usually includes looking at, discussing, and making still and moving pictures, discovering and articulating how images communicate meaning. In such work there are many writing "spin-offs." Write captions and/or speech bubbles for strip cartoons. Write notes on pictures--perhaps with older students under headings such as denotation and connotation. Look at and discuss pairs of stereo-typed pictures of people (for example a hippie, an authoritarian teacher); write dialogues between them or narrate part of a story from the point of view of first one, then the other. From pictures of disasters, accidents, etc. write newspaper reports, then reports to be read on T.V. (Will they differ? How?) Write a description of someone based solely on seeing a photograph of his/her room. Look at pictures of places you know well taken at different times of day/week (for example, Saturday morning, Sunday evening, Monday morning). Try to convey in writing the different atmospheres.⁴

Devising straight or spoof advertisements can be enjoyable and is best done as part of a thorough consideration of the subject.⁵ If you want to do some comprehension work why not buy copies of a popular newspaper occasionally (say enough for one between two in the group) and send students on a treasure hunt for information? (Who has written to the editor about vandalism? What are his main points? Why is X so angry this morning? (Comic strip)). One-off ideas have an important place: Alice in Tellyland; read part of a story: now write on; read a story: now write it from someone else's point of view. If a student is not only reluctant but can scarcely write anyway, let him talk a story into a recorder for a friend or you to transcribe, and perhaps share with the group and/or display later. Students are often motivated--and teachers often "sell" assignments to them--by means of end-products. Group newspapers or magazines--by no means a new idea--can be very useful in this respect. They are a means of drawing together disparate work and also those who produce it. There is room for "objective" reporting, opinion, speculation, stories, letters, ads, word puzzles, cartoons, etc.,

also for co-operation and role-play which can promote an understanding of the nature of mass communication. There is value in setting up simulation exercises. For example, news, photos and ads are fed in to the "office." Students produce front and/or other pages against a rigid going-to-press deadline. Newspapers can be useful in topic teaching also. If students research an historical period or topic in order to write a project, the result is all too often a rehash or straight copy of the material provided. This information at worst does not even pass through, let alone remain in, the consciousness of the student. Colleague to daughter (aged nine): What's your project about?

Daughter: I don't know. I haven't read it yet.

But if it has to be transformed into material for a newspaper of the period in question (on-the-spot reports of the Battle of Yorktown, contemporary ads, etc.) it becomes a valuable exercise.

TEACHING INFORMATION AND SKILLS IN ATTRACTIVE AND NOVEL WAYS

In the past two decades or so there has been extensive reconsideration of just what language knowledge and technical equipment for writing students need. The case for teaching grammar has been hard to sustain. As the Bullock Report argues, understanding of traditional grammar (manifested for example in an ability to analyse complex sentences into clauses) appears to confer no advantages in respect of writing performance.⁶ So out it goes. New approaches to developing an understanding of language are often linguistics-based,⁷ and linguists have been quick to point out the unsatisfactory nature of classification under such headings as noun, adjective, verb, and adverb. But until more exact and equally manageable categories are evolved, and providing the student is often reminded that the component parts of a living, evolving language can never be precisely classified, some teachers may find the traditional terms useful--for example to avoid circumlocution when drawing attention to an unimaginative, mis- or over-use of adjectives in a student's work. If so then there must be an attempt to find lively ways of providing this knowledge. For example show a picture:

Q. Can you list some nouns?

A. Man, glass, hair, conversation, guests...

Q. How about some adjectives to tell us more about those nouns?

A. Fat, full, blonde, animated, bored...

Q. Some verbs?

A. Sitting, holding, simpering, staring...

Q. Adverbs?

A. Comfortably, negligently, foolishly, fixedly...

If the value of traditional parts-of-speech classification is sometimes questioned, there is little doubt about the value of spelling accuracy and none at all about the need for mastery of punctuation.

Much has been written about spelling. Margaret Peters has produced an excellent, balanced survey, while a look at a fringe view can be invigorating. There seems to be a consensus for concentration of the commonest words in an individual's repertoire; on developing habits of systematic learning (involving constant use of dictionaries and essential to all but the most gifted of spellers); on bringing as many senses as possible into that learning; and on guarding against the development of a poor self-image in respect of spelling. It is useful to get students to keep records (e.g. on slips of paper kept in individual boxes or--in pencil--in pocket notebooks) of words they get wrong so they can devote odd moments to working on them, throwing away slips or erasing entries once words are mastered. Picking out the troublesome part(s) of words in block capitals can help focus the problem. The Bullock Report mentions (page 168) the practice of students leaving a wide margin, the teacher writing in it corrected spellings (well-chosen, and not too many), and the student snipping off the margin to clip into his spelling book/folder. Sponsored spelling projects (based on words troubling individuals and resembling in organisation other sponsored activities--walks, for example) are steadily gaining popularity--perhaps not least because of the funds they provide for enriching school facilities.

Punctuation is better tackled within the context of actual writing than as information and skills to be taught separately from writing and tested in exercises. The act of writing obviously generates the need for punctuation to assist communication of meaning. Students, with this in mind, should be urged to look critically at their work, including punctuation, and to carry out a proof-reading exercise for themselves and/or their friends before handing it in. However, where problems are identified, systematic teaching of particular conventions is useful. Two suggestions may indicate the kind of approaches it seems important to develop. First, take a (carefully-chosen) page from a book the group (or one member of it) is currently reading. Look at and discuss the way the author is using particular conventions; concentrate perhaps on uses of the comma. This could be followed by issuing a version of the page from which all punctuation (or commas) have been omitted for students to insert. This might show what students have understood about the relationship between meaning and punctuation--in the particular passage at least. (A look at some of John Clare's poetry which uses no punctuation can be interesting. Why does it remain easy to read aloud at sight? Why is "prose meaning" rarely if ever in doubt in spite of lack of punctuation?) Second, devise novel ways of teaching individual punctuation marks. Speech marks, for example. Get students to bring in

comics and to write out the stories (or parts of them). Obviously the contents of speech bubbles will go into speech marks; equally obviously nothing else will. On another occasion a story may be turned into comic form (pin men drawings, speech bubbles, etc.). This is an attractive yet sound approach. I have seen an experienced teacher reinforcing punctuation by getting individual students to play the roles of individual marks, jumping up at appropriate moments as the group works through a story. Even the Victor Borge record on which he substitutes evocative noises for punctuation marks might help you make certain points. More pooling of novel yet sound approaches would be to everyone's benefit. I should certainly be most interested to hear from anyone who has devised such approaches.

FOOTNOTES

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Writing Isn't So Bad After All

Patricia Phelan

Lots of kids hate to write. In fact, at the beginning of the school year you as a teacher may get the distinct impression that there is going to be a contest of wills in which you will give a composition assignment, they will refuse to do it in all of the more and less subtle ways people can resist things, and the battle over writing has begun the first week of the school year.

There are a lot of good reasons why kids hate to write. In general, by the time they arrive in secondary school, they have had, say, at least one hundred defeating experiences with writing. They are self-conscious to a painful degree. Past failures loom like mountains over them. They are sure that everyone knows they really can't spell, that no one can read their handwriting, that they have always been unsure where periods go, and there is no sense to having to put ideas on paper anyway since they are going to become motorcycle mechanics. A lot of this is true, so what are we struggling for?

I believe that writing can be fun for kids, that they can really enjoy words, working together, talking over ideas, discovering new things. The more interested they are in the whole languaging process the more "literate" people they will become. In fact, writing as enjoyment may have something to offer after all.

Here is a three-step sequential plan for getting kids involved with writing. My classes have often been the "under-achievers," so you may find some of these things too simple. Even experienced writers might enjoy doing them, however. Just be sure that you do the writing along with your classes. I have this dream of reading a really great novel about what it's actually like to be a teacher. One of you may find such a book beginning to unfold as you write along with your students.

1. Timed writing. Ask students to write as many words as they can in one minute. The words all need to be different. There are probably lots of rules that could be made to go with this, but it doesn't matter. What matters is that spelling and handwriting don't count, so everyone can do it. Use a stopwatch if you can get one, because it looks official and sets just the right mood of fun. The person who gets the most words win. The winner must have his words counted by another classmate to be

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sure. Keep track of the winners for a week and give a prize to the highest number for the week, if you wish. One week is about right to break in a junior high/middle school class to writing without being afraid. For an older class two days ought to do it.

2. Lists. A logical step from speed writing of words is to ask students to make lists. Again, these are single words, not whole compositions, so everyone in class can do it. Have students put these lists in journals so that they can furnish material for compositions during the rest of the year. Likes and dislikes form the basis for easy lists. For example, students list the foods they like (dislike) to eat, the people they like (dislike), the places they would like (dislike) to visit or have visited, the TV shows they like (dislike), the music they like (dislike). Keep the stopwatch handy and time this list making so that you give perhaps two list topics each day, one or two minutes per list. Students may add to the lists as time goes on, so it is a good idea to have them leave room in their journals. After students have begun journal writing, it is nice to put ideas for lists on the board now and then so that they can sometimes add to this beginning activity. A writing assignment later might be to refer to their lists and pick something for a composition on likes and dislikes.

3. Five minute journal writing. Ask students to write for five minutes in journals at the beginning or end of the class period. They may write anything they wish to copy from a book, but the writing must be in sentences. Have a writing idea on the board each day to help start those students who may need it. It is necessary to decide for yourself how you are going to evaluate these. I prefer saying that they will be graded on volume of writing, simply writing as much as they can for that five minute period. I go through journals about every two weeks and put the date, a grade (fairly high, because this is a lot of work), and my signature. If students wish me to read something especially, I ask them to turn the corner of the page down and I will read that; otherwise, I don't read them word for word, just skim. Again, spelling and mechanics don't count. Sometimes when I read journals I make a list of the major skills that seem to be a problem for the class in general so that we can work on them together.

From single words to lists to sentences is a short journey. Following are some writing ideas that are pleasant to do and have had good results for me. They can be used for long compositions or for short journal writing ideas.

4. Found words. Up to this point students have done a lot of writing, but none of it has been long or taken up much time. One enjoyable step before assigning the first composition is to encourage students to become aware of words around them. "Found Poetry" is a lot of fun. Have students make a list in their journals of all of the commercially printed words they can find on the walls of the school buildings (not graffiti). Depending on your situation and the weather, they can take ten minutes to walk

about your room and outside to make a list of all the words they see, then come back and arrange them in lines like a poem. "Found Poetry" can also be made by referring to printed matter which people carry in wallets, pockets and purses. It is fun to "find" poetry by cutting lines out of headlines in the newspaper or magazines. Here the student doesn't have to think up anything, just arrange words. Of course it is the same composing process, and a very creative one at that, but he doesn't think it's work if it's fun. Amazing!

5. Cut and paste. There is something freeing about using your hands to cut things out and paste them on paper. It is always enjoyable. When you have a class which particularly bugs you, include a couple of days with this kind of activity and you will find that students talk quietly together, are friendly and helpful to each other, and in general will do a better than average piece of writing. It does seem a pity, after all, that as soon as humans leave the elementary grades behind we sit them in rows in chairs and don't let them do any of that fun stuff again--the stuff that has scissors, glue, crayons and marking pens to go with it. Ask them to find a picture or caption in a magazine or newspaper that really interests them. Then they are to write about it in a composition. The composition may describe the scene, be a beginning for a short story, relate to an experience in their own lives, be a dialogue between people in the picture, or be a poem. The picture or caption needs to be attached to the paper so that you can see what the writing is about. Papers of this kind make a nice display in the room and particularly interest parents when open house night comes.

6. Topics. I assume that your students are writing fairly comfortably now. Many of them will have their own ideas of things to write about and won't want to be bothered. Still, a few will always want writing ideas. So whenever I give an assignment to write something and turn it in, I give two or three different topics, just in case someone is still trying to avoid writing. These are suitable for five minute journal entries or longer papers. If an idea interests you, the teacher, so that you are excited about it first, it is more likely that students will be interested in it. Here are some suggested topics:

- * Put a random list of words on the board that could be used in any way a person wishes. For example: sun, trees, blue, ladybug, grass, smooth.
- * Cut captions out of magazines, tape to the top of a piece of composition paper and distribute to the whole class. Their writing must relate to or use the phrase in some way.

Trouble on

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN

on top of things

It is also possible to use small pictures cut from poster catalogs and other advertising mail that comes to English teachers by the bushel.

- * When special holidays come around, buy some of those small stickers that are seasonal. Put these at the top of a piece of paper if you want a composition or on an empty page in the student's journals for a nice surprise when they begin their journal writing next day. Speaking of stickers, I received some of the most creative and exciting writing last year when I just put a one inch circle sticker on the page and asked them to use that blue circle in any way they wanted. Some drew on it to create a face, a planet, a flower. Others used it as a dot, a hole, an eye. The writing that accompanied these circles was delightful.
- * Read to the class a short news article or a new idea that you have come upon. Ask them to comment on it by writing their opinion and giving reasons for the opinion. Doing this once a week or so will be good practice for careful thinking. Perhaps students will begin to bring in ideas that interest them, also. It seems that writing is better when students have time to think and talk ideas over together before they write.
- * Read to the class anything you like--a poem, a short story. Play a record for them. Show them a short film. Ask them to react to this with a composition in which they relate what they have seen and heard to their own experience, write something similar to it, write a critical review of it, write a letter to the author or producer of it, express an opinion about how it affected them.
- * Give the class two minutes to walk all around the room and find something that interests them or something that they have never noticed before, then write about it for five or ten minutes. This is a good activity to do when you have just got something new up on the bulletin board but no one has noticed it yet.
- * Letter writing can be rewarding. This assignment is a lot of work for you, but it has helped to build rapport and closeness in even my most uncooperative classes. I suggest doing this with only one class at a time. Try your least friendly group first. Tell the students to write a short letter to you, "Dear Mrs. Phelan,..." telling anything they wish about themselves, with the understanding that you will answer the letter. I write a short note on the bottom or back of the letter. When all are finished I return the letters at the beginning of class in envelopes with formal names

on the front, like "Mr. Kelly Salazar." Everyone in class seems genuinely pleased. I usually continue to answer any notes as often as they wish to write me, but these tend to dwindle rapidly. It is more exciting if you have some real letter paper to write on. It would also be fun to do the same assignment but have everything be a lie, even a "tall tale."

7. Evaluation. If these ideas work for you and students begin to enjoy writing, you will be deluged with papers. Here are some things you will need to decide. How much writing do you need to grade? (One paper a week?) What do you need to mark on the paper? (Correcting every error is a waste of time.) What kind of help does the individual student want and need? (Ask the student and note your own observations in your grade book.) How much work are you willing to take home with you? (It's OK for you to enjoy and relax at home without thinking about school every evening.) Once you have decided on your answers to these questions, here are some suggestions:

- * Use different colors for grading each time; green and purple seem to please students instead of red.
- * Grade journal writing every few weeks, just skimming through for volume.
- * Collect all of the papers from one week. Return these to students on a given day. Have individuals pick the one piece of work they like best to re-write and turn in for a grade.
- * Read a set of papers and grade on one specific, pre-assigned area like spelling, mechanics, topic sentences, paragraph development or whatever you are stressing that week.
- * Use small groups of students to read, revise, and help each other with a given piece of writing so that the finished product is the best a student can do before it comes to you.
- * Keep all writing, rough or finished, in individual folders.

Whatever you do with writing, don't be afraid to try something different, to break into your established procedure and do something you can't be sure will be successful. Ask the class what they want and need. They will be sure to be honest with you and probably gracious in their willingness to help you, the teacher, do an even better job of helping them write.

There are as many good resources available as there are fine teachers. Listed below are some that have been a continuing source of ideas for me.

Dunning, Stephen. For Poets. Poetry 2: A Scholastic

Literature Unit, Series 4100. New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1975. (Found poetry)

Fader, Daniel. The New Hooked on Books. New York: Berkley Publishing Corporation, 1976. (Journals)

Holt, John. What Do I Do Monday? New York: Dell Publishing Company, Inc., 1970. (Lists, journals, writing)

Kraft, Eric and Charles Neuschafer. Personal: An Elective Course in Journal Writing. Lexington, Mass.: Ginn and Company, 1975. (Journals)

Moffett, James. A Student-Centered Language Arts Curriculum Grades K-13: A Handbook for Teachers. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973. (Lists, journals, languaging)

Summerfield, Geoffrey. The Creative Word 1. New York: Random House, Inc., 1973. (Many writing ideas)

NEW PUBLICATIONS ON WRITING

The most recent report from the National Assessment of Educational Progress on the writing of 9-year-olds, 13-year-olds, and 17-year-olds, Explanatory and Persuasive Letter Writing, is available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. Order NAEP Report No. 05-W-03, S/N 017-080-01666-4 for \$.90.

The NCTE has published a collection of articles on current knowledge about evaluating writing, called, appropriately, Evaluating Writing: Describing, Measuring, Judging, edited by Charles R. Cooper and Lee Odell. Order No. 16221J, from National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801--\$4.50 for NCTE members or \$5.75 for non-members.

Richard Beach has published a 30-page booklet describing writing assignments and classroom activities involving autobiographies, memoirs, and portraits that will involve students emotionally. Entitled Writing About Ourselves and Others, this latest booklet in the Theory and Research into Practice Series published by ERIC/RCS and NCTE is available from the National Council of Teachers of English, order number ISBM: 0-8141-58838-4, NCTE No. 58838, for \$1.40 for NCTE members or \$1.95 for non-members.

Practical Applications: Technical Writing in the High School

Eleanor Nudd

WHAT IS TECHNICAL WRITING?

A short answer to the above question might be that technical writing is expository writing that conveys information on a technical subject. However, short answers are apt to be sketchy, as this one is.

The term "technical writing" covers a multitude of forms, such as articles, reports, manuals of instruction, and even business letters. The subject matter may have to do with biology, physics, manufacturing, cosmetology, or even cooking. This range is one of the reasons technical writing is useful in high school composition courses: it allows students to write about their own areas of interest and expertise.

Technical writing is characterized by its objectivity. Although it may present opinions, these must be labeled as such and supported by facts. It requires logical organization of material so that the reader's progress from a to b is not impeded by x. Above all it requires accuracy, specificity, and clarity. The reader of a set of instructions for installing a suspended ceiling needs to know what is involved in the operation beyond any possible doubt. He cannot afford to guess at the writer's intended meaning.

WHY SHOULD TECHNICAL WRITING BE TAUGHT IN THE HIGH SCHOOL?

High school composition is too often taught in a vacuum. The student takes a composition course to improve his ability to write correctly, but the course assignments too often leave him wondering why. He is writing only to fulfill the course requirements and only for the eyes of the teacher.

Thus, one reason for teaching technical writing in the high school is to enable the student to see some purpose in what he is doing. He writes out of specific knowledge to inform someone who knows less about the subject than he does. When this person happens to be his English teacher, he gains an added dollop of satisfaction!

Technical writing assignments are more likely to make sense to the student than are assignments based upon literature or even those based upon personal experience. When a student is asked to analyze or evaluate a literary work, he is often put

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in the position of trying to guess what the teacher wants him to say; writing done from uncertainty seldom achieves coherence. Moreover, literature as a subject is often too far away from the student's cognizance: he is writing about a country that may be totally strange. On the other hand, when a student is asked to write about events that have affected him or about his own thoughts and emotions, he is put in the equally difficult position of having either to expose concerns he may wish to keep private or to deal skimpily with the subject. In this case, he may be too close to the subject or may not yet have come to terms with his experiences and himself.

Neither of the above conditions is, of course, absolute. Many students are able to deal with literary or personal assignments both readily and well. But there are many others who find the middle ground of precise, informative technical writing more congenial and also more conducive to the improvement of their writing skills.

For in this kind of writing sloppiness sticks out like a sore thumb. It is even apparent to the student.

WHAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN A TECHNICAL WRITING COURSE?

Since high school students are not full-fledged engineers, machinists, or scientists, technical writing assignments must be geared to their level of expertise. Teachers will find, however, that a single assignment can be handled by different students at their individual levels: an assignment to write a set of technical instructions might result, for example, in papers on how to change a tire, how to clean a typewriter, or how to test for polluted water.

One might begin with the writing of definitions. Many technical terms used in writing instructions and reports need to be defined for the reader who may be unfamiliar with them, so this preliminary exercise will be useful later on. It is immediately useful in helping the student review sentence structure and in making him conscious of format. A definition requires three distinct parts: term, class, and limiting characteristics. By learning to include these vital steps, the student prepares himself to follow more complex formats as he progresses to longer assignments.

Writing technical descriptions is another assignment with multiple benefits. Careful observation of the object or mechanism to be described is essential. Next the student must determine the best organization for his description--from bottom to top, side to side, exterior to interior or vice versa. Making this decision can help the student see the fundamental relationship of subject and written structure. And finally, the student's vocabulary will be stretched by the need for exact words to describe such things as the "plinth" of an athletic trophy or the "chamfered" edge of a bushing.

Descriptions of processes, "how-to" papers, summaries and analyses all serve to carry the student along to the writing of reports. Models help greatly here to differentiate the various kinds of report the student may be asked to write.

A project report is perhaps the simplest. The student writes about something he has actually done: a picnic table built in wood shop, a van painted in auto mechanics, or an afghan crocheted for home ec. Whatever he or she has done that used both tools and materials, took at least a week's work, and resulted in a three-dimensional object will serve as a topic.

Resource reports are written from library sources and/or information derived from someone knowledgeable in the field. The important point here is that the student should try to answer a question or solve a problem. He should not simply amass facts about a technical subject. He should not, for example, try to find out as much as possible about solar heating but should look for answers to such questions as: What types of solar heating are now available for home construction? or What are the advantages of underground construction when using solar heat? In short, he should look for practical applications.

Finally, students might try the proposal report in which they take a problem, investigate it, and propose a solution. This type of report may be slanted at a problem much closer to home than the problems aimed at in resource reports. The traffic problem in the school halls, the need for new stage lighting, the feasibility of silk screening school bumper stickers are only a few of the possibilities.

HOW SHOULD TECHNICAL WRITING BE EVALUATED?

Most of the questions one usually asks about a piece of writing are also applicable to technical writing: Is it grammatical? clear? well organized? But the overriding question is that of practical application. The student himself should learn to ask: Would I want to submit this proposal to the school board? Would this report be acceptable for presentation to the manager of a business? Until he can answer in the affirmative, he should not be satisfied with his work.

Yes, Mr. and Ms. English Teacher, Students Can Write Original Short Stories

Judith B. Schaumberg

Each of us has perhaps suffered the demoralizing experience of reading student written original short stories that are shallow, undeveloped plot outlines. The characters are flat, perhaps only named or given a brief physical description. The settings are mere statements of time and place. The plot is little more than a series of events through which plastic characters march.

If the reader has indeed met the type of frustration described, perhaps a technique which has been used to lead students through the writing of what we English teachers would consider an acceptable short story would be welcomed. The theory around which the technique revolves is that students write undeveloped short stories because they have incomplete concepts of what constitutes each of the short story elements. The technique is based on Harold Herber's discussion of the literal, interpretive, and application levels of comprehension in conceptualization, (Teaching Reading in Content Areas, Prentice Hall, 1970, pp. 61-101). Students are unable to write short stories, which is an application level activity, because they are still manipulating the concept on the lower levels of understanding: the literal and interpretive levels.

The challenge to the teacher, therefore, becomes one of leading the students through each succeeding level of understanding to the point where they can apply the concepts to the writing of original short stories. This can be accomplished through a very structured series of lessons and activities which assure complete conceptualization of each short story element in turn. In my class, the culmination of the series of lessons on the elements is to write an original setting, character sketch, and plot including the use of foreshadowing techniques. These are finally interwoven to produce the final product, an original short story.

I help students develop the concept of each of the elements in similar ways. Lessons include the following steps which lead to the formation of the concept.

1. Definition of the element
2. Examples of it
3. Questions regarding it
4. Reading short stories in which the element is a crucial part
5. Identification of the element within stories read

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6. Questions about the story with attention to the element being studied
7. Outline for the student written element
8. Student writing of the element

For the sake of brevity, below is the series of lessons my class did on just one short story element, setting:

Step 1. The setting of a short story was defined as the place and time in which the events occur.

Step 2. Two examples were provided that indicated setting for a story:

The mountain climber approached the peak. He knew it would be a difficult one to climb.

The mountain climber moved skillfully through the valley. Suddenly, he was startled by the sight of a huge peak looming up at the end of the narrow, rock-strewn tunnel. He saw that it was very high, snow covered and craggy. He knew it would be difficult to climb.

Step 3. Observations regarding the two sample settings were arrived at through discussion questions:

Which of the two helped you to best "see" surroundings?

Tell what it looks like in your words.

Where would you expect to see a scene such as that described.

What details helped you to "see" this scene?

What does the character feel about the scene?

What details are clues to his feelings?

Step 4. Stories that depended on setting as one of the integral elements for their telling were assigned for reading. A few stories which suit this criterion would be:

"Luck of Roaring Camp" Bret Hart

"The Pride of Seven" Robert W. Krepps

"The Gift" Ray Bradbury

"The Most Dangerous Game" Richard Connell

"By the Waters of Babylon" Steven Vincent Benet

Step 5. Students were asked to relate the setting of the story and to list the clues the author provided which led them to determine the story's setting.

Step 6. They were then asked how the story would have been changed if it had a new time and place for its events. Which details within the story would have to be changed

in order to meet the requirements of the new setting? Finally, they were given a totally new time and place and directed to rewrite a short section of the story read to fit the new setting.

- Step 7. The students were then directed to think of a setting they might use for a story they would be interested in writing. They stated the time and place in which the events of their story would occur and listed details which could convey the setting to the reader without actually telling him what the setting was.
- Step 8. Finally, the students wrote a two or three paragraph paper which was the setting of their original short story and was based on their listing of clues for the reader. They were cautioned not to directly state the time and place anywhere within the description. If they'd done a good job with the description, the reader would know the setting because of the clues the writer had supplied.

The series of lessons described, did in fact, lead students from the literal level of recognizing and stating the setting, through the interpretive level of changing details within the story to suit a new setting, and into an application level or re-organizing what they had learned about setting to create their own. The same pattern was used in developing the concepts of characterization and plot. In each case the pattern ended with the student writing his own element. Once all of the pieces were completed, a little time was spent on transitions and their use in writing. Finally, the students put all of the pieces together with transitional statements and passages, culminating in their own original short story.

Can Old Time Radio Horror Shows Unblock the Self-Imposed Barriers to Student Creativity?

Art Groth

Good evening, coterie of the creaking door, devotees of the demented laugh, aficionados of the appalling shriek in the night. This is your sanguinary storyteller, welcoming you to a gruesome gambol through a few vintage radio horror shows and the creative writing experiences they inspire. I hope you will pardon the frequent lapses your narrator makes into the patter of the typically hideous radio host, but I have been a follower of fantastic radio for so long, it is difficult for me to be otherwise than fiendishly fatuous. Besides, this style seems suitable for discussing the moldering tape recordings I have exhumed to efficiently exorcise whatever haunts your students' creativity. So curdle up closer to the fire, tune into a new grave length and lend a fear.

As a trafficker in trepidations, I find the most harmful horrors are actually the very common student fears of ridicule and failure. These phantasms intimidate creativity much as noisy houses petrify babysitters. For expeditious exorcism, however, just offer your students the following horrendous hunks of horror, and you should notice your novices much less inclined to slight the powers of their own macabre imaginations.

Listen to "Three Skeleton Key"--Vincent Price and two companions operate an isolated lighthouse off the coast of French Guinea. One lonely night, a derelict ship crashes on the shore and "a hundred! No, a thousand! No, an inestimable number!" of very hungry ship's rats converge on the lighthouse and begin munching their way to the top where the three have cached themselves. Louie ("whose arms were as big around as my legs") is ravished by a rabid rat and dies of blood poisoning. August (a red-haired, humpbacked dwarf who played lead villain in the Grand Guignol) succumbs to an insane sense of humor and tries to let the rats in. Mr. Price is narrowly saved when a small banana boat, unaware of the danger because of the now extinguished beacon, grounds softly on the rock and the rats silently attack it as it floats off to sea. The show concludes by observing that there now sails upon this ocean a boat without a crew, "that is, without a human crew!" (Cue the organist.)

This intriguing and infamous rat menace yarn from the Escape series has a conclusion that is flatter than a glass coffin top. My classes agree the show at least requires a few stifled screams from the banana boat crew, and they proceed to concoct some gloriously grotesque finales of their own after

Chairperson of the English department at Bristol (Connecticut) Eastern High School, Mr. Groth's "principal pathology" (as he put it) is popular culture.

listening to the weak professional version. I often suggest students rewrite the story from a more gratifying point of view...say, the rats'. To infest themselves with the sinister spirit of the occasion, they might try role playing some of the more sensational screams...scenes, I mean.

"OK, who wants to be the rat that gets Louie?"

"Right, now who wants to be Louie?"

Anybody too nauseated by this nastiness can design an advertising poster for the show: "You'll need a couple of slavering, bloodlusting-type rodents leering mercilessly at a defenseless, semi-clad lighthouse and...you have a better idea? Well, here's the red paper."

Those who prefer a still tamer and more traditional preparation for the revision, might enjoy creating similes for some of the show's basic images: the ocean off French Guinea; the wind on that ocean; the first sighting of the rat ship; fighting a rat; the rats' eyes at night. With a little malevolent manipulation, students can be more outrageous and probably more original than these actual examples of the program's figurative language:

a grey-green sea, scummed and warm as soup;

a wind that smelled like death;

on the ship, a dark brown carpet that looked like a gigantic fungus, but undulating;

fighting that rat was like fighting a panther;

at night, the rat's eyes blinked and twinkled like the stars of Hell.

Here is another anecdote for the anxious, "Wailing Wall"--Boris Karloff is rescued from his burning home and brought to a hospital where, upon regaining consciousness, he leaps out the top floor window having first obligingly written the suicide note which serves as the script for this especially formulaic show. We flashback then to a brighter moment in Boris's life where he is puttering about downstairs, digging a grave in the wall for his nag of a wife. When she conveniently enters to harass him about the mess he's making, Boris strangles her and walls up her body. Immediately thereafter, and to Boris's increasing horror for the next forty years, a haunting wail sounds from the very wall behind which stands the corpse of his wife. To keep the audience from investigating too closely the logic of all this, the program provides another on-stage strangulation, one body mutilated by a boat propeller, a lisping lunatic and a hole in the wall through which, ironically, the wind has been wailing all along. Tasteful themes explored include suicide, arson, starvation, blackmail, and insanity. As the maleficent

muse would have it, this preposterous program is practically a lesson in the writing of horror shows, and once students apprehend the format, they can rewrite the whole story in any variety of ways by simply replacing appropriate criteria. In other words, horror hobbyists, if someone will hand me that hatchet, I'll hack this show into its various pieces, and somewhat like the good Dr. Frankenstein, substitute alternative members and reassemble the newly formed monster.

Our first incision exposes the narrator, a henpecked, murderous husband. From that well-worn Battle-of-the-Sexes container, we select any married protagonist--perhaps the myopic, beer can collector--and clamp him into place. Cutting a bit deeper, we remove the pair of matched victims, one nagging wife and one black-mailing girlfriend. We shall append, from the formaldehyde jar of Unsympathetic Female Stereotypes, two devious damsels. For that bleeding organ, we'll substitute an equally weird harmonica. Coming to the heart of the matter, we'll rearrange some of this messy sensationalism by stitching in a city-wide blackout in place of the burning building. And instead of a suicidal leap from a hospital window, how about a hanging in the basement? (If Boris were a novelist, that would put him in the best cellar class). Despite all the gore strewn about, we must not forget our gratuitous violence. We shall excise those vivid stranglings and add some aluminum can lacerations about the throat and...you say you don't wish to continue? But we were just getting ready to attach a very heavy irony, two small ethnic stereotypes, another artificial--though certainly temporary--sexism, and then wire the whole body back together with dialogue and sound effects. Well, I'll just put the corpse on ice and you can come back to romp in the remains at another time.

If these two Stygian stories have not yet glutted your gullet with gore, I recommend you attempt "Shriek of the Week" by allowing students to complete the following diabolic dramas.

1) You are the last person on earth sitting alone in your room and you hear a knock at the door. Would you expect it to be what is described in the Dimension X interpretation of Fredric Brown's story, "Knock"?

2) You are Don Adams, a writer of horror stories like this one, The Green Lorelei, and you are convinced that the eerie singing from the Steinmetz apartment upstairs belongs to the wife whom the recluse, Steinmetz, claims does not exist. Obtaining a pass key, you enter the murky old apartment while Mr. Steinmetz is absent. You creep cautiously across the dusty living room floor towards the kitchenette which is hidden behind drawn curtains. Throwing open the curtains, you find...!

3) You are Guy Burkhardt who awakes screaming every morning to find that today is once again June 15. Nobody else remembers this remarkable fact except you and your one friend, both of whom do some exploration and discover a complex "Tunnel Under the World" which contains....

If these three incomplete tales are infuriating to you, the completed versions in their banality or absurdity would be even more frustrating. The "Fright of the Night" (or was it "Dismay of the Day"?) prize should be awarded to that student who most imaginatively fleshes out these skeletons and leaves the original renditions to molder in their mausoleums. Should you find you really relish constructing scaffolds upon which to hang brief but beguiling bestialities, you can play the summary of next week's program that closes each horror broadcast. This device seems to produce numerous nasty narratives, as long as the writing assignment lasts only ten minutes (and it helps if I really do have next week's show).

Teenagers reared on modern meat movies like "Night of the Living Dead" or "Texas Chainsaw Massacre" will be fairly phlegmatic about old radio horror, but this works more to our advantage than not. Essentially, we want them to lose their self-consciousness over their creative abilities, and if they think they can better the nasties they hear, then mighty more malignancy to them. Still, one can stimulate surprising shudders with Vincent Price (again) in "Present Tense." First ask the class to list or describe sound effects which would most horrifyingly depict death; then let them hear this delightful display with its meat cleaver murders and gas chamber executions (in instant replay).

Radio, the "theater of the mind," often uses a wide variety of imaginative sound effects. Yet, radio monsters unfortunately seem subject to the same redundant stereotypes. The heavy breathing and groaning you hear may sound like an obscene phone caller with a tummy ache, but it is none other than the Frankenstein monster in the Suspense version of Mary Shelley's tale. Don't you think your students, ten minutes, and a tape recorder could motivate meaner ghastliness?

As a product of its time, radio horror also reflects another stereotype in its limited portrayal of women, and the genre's champion chauvinist, in my opinion, is Lamont Cranston, The Shadow. Some student should write a letter to Lamont's "constant friend and companion," the incredibly naive, Margot Lane, advising her that Lamont has been clouding more than villainous minds with those secrets he learned in the "Orient." The Shadow at his nostalgically noxious best can be heard in "The Creeper," as Margot is kidnapped by a cackling crackpot who laughs like Burgess Meredith. Madman and Shadow spend time dueling each other with hysterical laughter until the meaner psychopath prevails and Margot's captor accidentally dynamites himself to Justice. There is always a fascinating eye-for-an-eye value system functioning in the Shadow series, worthy of student investigation. In another tale ("Death Stalks The Shadow") the merciless man of the shadows says to a guilty but obviously duped hireling awaiting electrocution for murder, "I can't save you, you know. You killed a man." The weed of crime certainly does bear bitter fruit.

Because of the intimate narrator-audience nature of radio, first person accounts in the forms of interior monologues or journal annals can be trenchantly tinglesome and useful as models for creative creepiness. A nightmarish example is Charlotte Gilman's "Yellow Wallpaper," which reveals the increasingly irrational mind of a bed-ridden hypochondriac who believes a menace is imprisoned behind the intricately patterned bedroom wallpaper and is gradually working its way loose into her room.

This program is a cut (or hack) above those so far discussed, and most likely also somewhat beyond our students' abilities. In part, this may be because "Yellow Wallpaper" is more terrifying than horrifying. Apparently, students can create greater grisliness than they can fright. Fine. We are striving for creative confidence, not complacency, and if there are a number of radio shows that cannot be equaled, they can at least be emulated.

The difference between horror and its comparatively rarer and more problematic counterpart, terror, may seem trivial, but our entire concern here has been with trivia and such distinctions can achieve cult-forming magnitudes (witness the separation often made between science fiction and fantasy, for example). Consequently, to assist all apprentices in apprehension, I shall close the scream door on this workout in weirdness by presenting--from a source I have since forgotten--a fantasy which demonstrates the peculiar natures of these two coffin cousins.

It is night. You are walking alone along a dimly lit city street when suddenly in an adjacent alleyway, you see a man with an ax, brutally attacking his victim. The feeling which quickly overcomes you is one of horror. When the ax murderer turns and looks at you, that is the feeling of terror.

And now, friends, it is time to close the creaking door for
this week. Good night, and pleasant dreams, hnnnnnnn...?

SOURCES

"The Creeper," THE SHADOW (circa 1938), with Orson Welles.

"Frankenstein," SUSPENSE (no dates), with Stacy Harris.
Certainly an unusual version!

"The Green Lorelei," SUSPENSE (no dates), with Bob Readick.

"Knock," DIMENSION X, May 6, 1950, from Fredric Brown's original story.

"Present Tense," ESCAPE, January 30, 1950, with Vincent Price.

"Three Skeleton Key," ESCAPE, March 17, 1950, with Vincent Price
(various versions of this story exist).

"Tunnel Under the World," X MINUS ONE, September 4, 1956, based on Frederik Pohl's unpredictable S.F. story.

"Wailing Wall," INNER SANCTUM (my tape has no dates), with Boris Karloff.

"The Yellow Wallpaper," SUSPENSE, July 29, 1948, with Agnes Moorehead.

Here are two old time radio companies that have supplied our school quite efficiently:

MAR-BREN SOUND LTD.

P. O. Box 4099

Rochester, N.Y. 14610

(excellent, annotated catalogs with concise information about each title listed).

RADIO RERUNS

P. O. Box 724

Redmond, Wash. 98052

Nobody but a blockhead ever wrote except for money.

Samuel Johnson

Humanizing the Teaching of Composition Through Continuing Adult Education

Leon Hymovitz

Not everyone can or should complete the high school program following the traditional time prescription.

At Northeast Standard Evening High School, classes in composition are a blend of adults of all ages and backgrounds, including out-of-school youth as well as those attending day school. The mix of years, lifestyles, marital status, employment, careers, interests, and vocational aspiration makes for a stimulating and challenging clientele, one markedly different from that in a regular high school. Some students want a diploma; others seek employment or advancement on-the-job. War veterans search for direction. Husbands and fathers are concerned about sharpening communication skills. In growing numbers, wives and mothers run from household and family dol-drums. A few students may consider higher education; still others would rather be "on the town" with friends or at home watching television.

From September to January and from February to June, classes in literature and composition are held each Monday and Wednesday evening for forty-five minute periods; clinic and lab periods are also available when the instructor or the student requests conference time.

The instructional program tests the mettle of both the teacher and the learner. As drop-out students on the come-back trail, many are acquiring make-up credits. Past failure contributes to the malaise that colors the students' attitude and motivation. Fear and self-consciousness account for much of the cynicism, suspicion, hostility, and anxiety that surface early in the term and must be dealt with as major hindrances to learning.

Writing is seen as self-disclosure, a treacherous and forbidding experience. After all, weren't they, the learners, taught long ago that creative expression was reserved for scholars and eggheads? They remember their papers coming back to them in various stages of decomposition, decorated in red, black and blue. A single symbol could result in marginal maiming; a letter--sometimes a number--reflected the cumulative net worth of the pupil's writing or creative potential. The lone

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grade included organization, style, mechanics, vocabulary, spelling, grammar, and usage--ignoring content or the quality and character of cognitive thought and feeling implicit in the theme. Occasionally, the writer was directed to revise the theme according to an arcane or cryptic code. In many cases, the paper's ultimate destiny was a matter of speculation.

Believing that their futures are behind them, these students have had their inventive viscera criss-crossed and now think with their blood. They are prisoners of their own minds--their thoughts never see the light of expression. Over the long haul, blunted creative impulses produce students who perceive writing as a charade designed to expose and to humiliate them.

Although this program is for adults--i.e. people who are no longer of the age of most high school students--the attitudes and skills of the students are not unlike those of many younger students in junior and senior high schools. Thus, the activities which work well with these older students should be applicable to students still in traditional school classrooms.

INITIATIVES

The teacher's most formidable hurdle is confronting the assumptions of damaged psyches in an accepting manner without patronizing the students' dignity or demeaning their integrity. The first principle, then, is to validate the learner's authenticity as a person. The teacher may cite e.e. cummings's admonition:

To be nobody but yourself in a world which is doing
its best day and night to make you everybody else
means to fight the hardest battle which any human
being can fight and never stop fighting.

Taking initiatives, the teacher reduces tensions, removes barriers, avoids sermons, and overcomes defensiveness. The teacher may discuss his own strengths and deficits to promote identification. He urges that to learn to write, one must write, willing to take risks with an instructor and a group he trusts.

OPENERS

The teacher is advised to learn all he can about the student. A profile sheet, entitled, "About Me," invites the student to tell about his family, children, aims, friends, and interests. A checklist includes concerns that touch on speaking, listening, concentrating, finding the "right word," or using media to good advantage (the average 18 year old has seen 25,000 hours of television).

The "About Me" sheet should include sentence completions:

- 1 - As a school, Northeast High is
- 2 - This class is

- 3 - Right now I would like
- 4 - I don't have courage to
- 5 - I get angry when
- 6 - I am happiest when
- 7 - I like teachers who
- 8 - If I had my way in this world, I
- 9 - Someday I will
- 10 - I don't like to write because

Tell five things that describe how you feel now:

- 1 -
- 2 -
- 3 -
- 4 -
- 5 -

The above activities are a beginning. The confidence quotient is the barometer to generate, measure, and release self-expression. The learner's daily human concerns become the central subject matter. All students have something to write. All topics are fair and imagination is never kept on the short leash of censorship.

Open-ended talk should precede "paper-talk." Reactions to love, marriage, death, human sexuality, jobs, taxes, drugs, war take precedence over attention to mechanics and grammar. Thinking, speaking, and writing are accompanied by a "feeling" dimension. To prompt spontaneity, the teacher shares topics couched in the form of a problem, requesting answers from a newspaper's ombudsman--an unseen advisor. Students respond to diverse issues:

Religion: - On the Way Back
 The Right to Die
 Keeping Family Together
 Diets I Have Conquered
 The End of Monogamy
 When Discipline Becomes Child Abuse
 Electoral College: A Political Anachronism
 Pride in Patriotism
 Our Carcinogenic Society
 The Return of Capital Punishment
 Kennedy and King: Conspiracies of Silence

The compassionate professional abides banalities, leaden fragments, or gargantuan run-ons. Written exploration must offer a sanctuary for bold adventure. Shackling imagination to rules prematurely will throttle the poetic flow. Repeated failure reinforces feeling of alienation and drives the student from the effort. Avoid "killer-phrases" that spell closure. Accompanied by a brief statement, "Fair," "Good," "Very Good," and "Excellent" suffice. Attempting to write a paper depends upon the ability and frustration tolerance of a student to take risks.

The teacher may want to limit the number of words in a sentence. To facilitate word or phrase placement or sentence manipulation, the student may work with various constructions on a flannel board.

When a student agrees, his paper is photocopied and, through the use of an overhead projector, the work is flashed on a screen. The author is not identified. Special pencils enable the teacher or the students to correct or to improve the writing through sharing suggestions.

Textbooks are used as aides to revise or to eliminate common errors. Because students cannot unravel corrective symbols, the teacher explains the error and rewrites words, phrases, or sentences that need clarification. As the class demonstrates mastery, pupils are asked to focus on a specific target--the use of end marks, punctuation, capitalization, correcting ideas. Correcting all errors in any one paper is traumatically discouraging for the pupils and impractical for the teacher.

COMPOSITION ACTIVITIES THAT WORK

What's In a Name? As part of the tactic to individualize and to personalize class techniques, instruct students to look up the meaning of their first names. Ask them to consider: In behavior and attitude, do you match your name's meaning? Are you like or different from that person? If you could change, what name would you adopt? Why? What is the derivation of your surname? If your family had a coat of arms, describe the symbols and their meanings.

It's In Our Stars. A sure-way to entice even the reluctant reader to check the daily newspaper is to introduce the practice of following one's horoscope. This activity will naturally segue into the Zodiac and an examination of qualities, traits, characteristics, in the home, job, school, marriage or business. Students may be asked to react, confirm or dispute in writing the accuracy of the account. What are Virgos and Libras really like? A daily log or journal is kept for a period to analyze the forecast. How did the week go? Did events match the daily prescription? With what sign is your Zodiac compatible? Write about an incident that illustrates this point.

I've Got To Be Me. The following assignments help students look at themselves:

Select a television, Hollywood, local or national personage to play you in a story. What qualities does this celebrity possess to portray your role?

As a director, how would you advise the actor to "capture your essence"?

Write a personal "Get Acquainted" ad about yourself for a magazine. Be candid. What unique and attractively appealing features, likes or dislikes would you highlight to describe yourself?

If you were to sell your mate or friend, how would you write the ad?

In what way is your mate like a little boy or girl? Distinguish between egocentricity and eccentricity.

Write your epitaph, eulogy, or obituary.

React in writing to a line or passage from the "Desiderata" or to an inspirational passage from Emerson.

Write A Mini-Theme:

Executions Should Be Televised
Unionize the Military
College is Obsolescent
Patty Hearst is An Innocent Victim
Violence is a Product of the Media

In seven or eight lines, tell about a student in class. Describe his personality--not the public person or the private person he thinks he is, but the character you think he is in the dark.

Interpret the lyrics of a popular tune such as the song made famous by O. J. Simpson: "Nobody Loves Me But My Momma and She May Be Jivin Me Too."

A Matter of Values--The Decision or Choice Mirrors Me. Much interest has been generated recently in films and books that deal with the survival genre. Cast the students in a key and strategic role in "Earthquake," "Towering Inferno," "Death Wish," "Survive," or in "The Taking of Pelham, 1-2-3." What value projections are involved as the students search for critical solutions to life and death conflicts?

The following "choice" selections should be accompanied by explanations:

My Greatest Male Hero
My Favorite Female Hero

Into a time capsule, I would include
 If I were in a hospital, I would want
 as a roommate
 Ten years from now, I want to be like
 If I had one million dollars, I would
 If I could choose another time to live
 in, I would choose
 Were the world coming to an end, I would
 choose these five for survival
 Were I an astronaut going to the moon,
 my co-pilot would be

Verbal Gerbils. Introduced as "Hanky-Panky"
 in 1965 by Dr. Raymond Rundus, Emporia, Kansas, and
 resurrected in 1975 by a radio station in Philadel-
 phia, "Verbal Gerbils" is a word game which, though
 imperfect and unscientific, has proved useful as a
 warm-up activity to begin each period. On the board
 are five definitions requiring a rhymed pair of
 words, the combination resulting in a noun-noun,
 adjective-noun, or participle-noun. Examples follow:

Disagreement over pronunciation - FRICTION DICTION
 Italian Redhead - TITIAN VENITIAN
 Evil Grin - VILE SMILE
 Bikini bottom - SCANTY PANTY
 Fish doctor - STURGEON SURGEON
 A wise thermometer - SAGE GAUGE
 Stylish Arabian Chieftan - CHIC SHEIK
 Pale signet - WAN SWAN
 Pope's Tree - PAPAL MAPLE
 Love for stylish clothes - FASHION PASSION
 A family of streakers - NUDE BROOD

Apart from its entertainment value as an effective
 facilitator, the game helps students to become sensitive
 to word patterns, to enrich vocabulary, to note spelling
 variations and homonyms, and to stimulate interest in
 the use of words generally.

Selective Grouping. Using a modified "buddy system"
 the teacher organizes the class into teams of three,
 consisting of a weak, average, and superior writer.
 Recognizing that "three helping one another bear the
 burden of six," the teacher uses this strategy based on
 his observation of student interaction. Students help
 students to dispel reticence and apprehension. Each of
 us is afraid of having his own ox gored but a supportive
 group sharing in an accepting atmosphere can transmute
 an attitude from one of despair to one of hope. In a
 smaller and more intimate group, students can dissect
 the architecture of a sentence, the geography of a para-
 graph. Students are their own severest critics in re-
 viewing slovenly craftsmanship. Learning to critique in
 an enabling role is a quantum leap for many.

Creative Journalism. Students conduct a campaign for a mayor or presidential candidate. They formulate a platform, simulate an interview, provide "spot" announcements and endorsements on radio, television, and newspapers. Slogans and acceptance speeches are prepared for candidates who may come from any period or place in history. The candidates reflect the thinking and purposes of their constituency. Reporters conduct a room to room "straw vote" and prepare releases detailing the results.

The teacher may read a brief article or editorial to the class; he asks the class to write a title or headline and compares their work with the original newspaper treatment.

Ditto an editorial cartoon or a comic strip, instructing the class to compose interpretative statements or dialogue.

"What If" conversations allow students to create dialogue between Richard Nixon and Andrew Johnson, between Martha Mitchell and Cleopatra. The "Godfather" of Mafia notoriety has a frank exchange with Julius Caesar.

Students may write publicity for the school weekly or daily newspapers relative to an activity in the program.

As an assignment, students are to pretend that they are "flogging" or "hawking" their latest book, T.V. show or movie. They are to prepare a blurb about their latest work for the papers.

Affective Composition Stimulators. Students select a 3 x 5 card from a box. They are to interpret the maxim or aphorism on the card in light of a personal experience in or out of school. Examples include:

Poverty is the parent of crime and
revolution.
We all have the strength to bear mis-
fortunes of others.
We are not punished for our sins, but
by them.
The most exhausting thing in life is
being insincere.
I have met the enemy and he is me.
The only people who never makes mistakes
are those who never do anything.
Woman would be more charming if one
could fall into her arms without falling
into her hands.

Large, attractive, and colorful pictures posted on the bulletin board lend themselves to creative interpretation and writing. Who are the people in the picture? What is their mood? Where are they going? What happened first? How will this scene end? What did he say or do to her? What will happen next?

Completing an anecdote that entails the use of witty repartee or finishing the end of a story are also exciting writing challenges.

EPILOGUE

H. L. Mencken might have been talking about teachers when he opined, "You don't discover truth, you only expose error." If art is an improvement over nature let themes appear on a canvas or tapestry that allows developing students their humanity and uniqueness to flower.

With terms like "accountability" and "performance appraisal" as current watchwords, it is on point to ponder the question: If I were indicted today for performing as a master teacher of composition, would there be enough evidence to convict me?

Northeast Standard Evening High School is ten years old. Dramatic stories punctuate a decade of uncommon commitment and perseverance. Consider the writer's multihandicapped student who attended seven years to complete this program; or the 45 year old student who changed from day employment to an all-night shift in order to attend evening classes. One feisty lady, a senior citizen and personal friend, who, though desperately hurt in a car accident near the school, resolved from her hospital bed to recover from her injuries to be present at graduation exercises. To the enthusiastic applause of her family and friends, she hobbled on crutches down the center aisle of the auditorium and gamely made her way to the stage.

At the end of each term, many pupils register for the next composition class--others don't. They move on to other jobs, schools, activities, or courses.

John Steinbeck has said, "Great writing has been a staff to lean upon, a mother to consult, a wisdom to pick up stumbling feet, and a courage to support sick cowardice." Nothing is both discovered and perfected at the same time. Through writing, a distinction is drawn between difference and deficiency. Students discover a way to talk, to be heard, and to lay bare the texture of their minds and spirits--in order to become "known and knowable" at a time when and in a place where only those who can communicate may become king.

Using Art to Teach Writing

Judithe Douglas Speidel

In attempting to explain students' lack of interest in reading worthwhile literature and the decline in their linguistic skills, educators usually put heavy blame on the visual media. Instead of deploring a predilection which is unlikely to lessen, given the ubiquity and potency of the media, a more productive tack is to look for ways that visual materials can facilitate, rather than retard, the development of verbal competencies. If adolescents' inarticulateness has its roots in "visual incapacity," a form of blunted sensibility which permits them to see only what they want to see, as J. W. P. Creber believes, then the problem becomes how to train for selective perception.

One way that I have tried to capitalize on students' receptivity to visuals has been to work with analogies between what an artist does when he paints and what a writer does when he creates images verbally. There is nothing unusual about using paintings or photographs in teaching English, of course, as many teachers have reported in the journals on methods for doing so, or have published in useful books like the popular Stop, Look and Write. But because my particular method, which is designed to increase specificity in writing through training in perception, has been demonstrated to be effective with students of below-average verbal ability, I would like to share it with other teachers.

The idea behind this method was stimulated by Francis Christensen's analysis of levels of modification in effective sentences, (Notes Toward a New Rhetoric, Harper and Row, 1967), an approach to writing that teaches students to see more by showing them how to sharpen their verbal images ("It is not so much that we only see what we are looking for as that we are not likely to see what we can not see how to use."). Addressing myself to what I consider a primary weakness in student writing--the use of vague generalizations--I attempted to follow Christensen's examples by putting stress on helping students to have more to say before they begin to write, instead of inhibiting them by identifying all of their errors afterwards. My approach focused on exposure to examples of selective perceptions in the arts and exercises in making and recording observations.

I developed a series of lessons on descriptive writing which incorporated slide reproductions of paintings and literary selections by established writers. Underlying these lessons were my assumptions that increasing one's visual awareness is an important step in developing writing skill, that visual percep-

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tion can be trained, and that this training can affect the recording of what has been observed. In order to verify these assumptions, I set up an experimental situation to test whether specificity in descriptive writing could be increased through training with visual materials, and to find out if lessons using visuals got better results in terms of specificity, quality, and student evaluations for interest and helpfulness than those without them.

The experiment took place over a three-week period in three senior high schools and involved a total of 148 sophomores and their three teachers. One class taught by each teacher was assigned to the experimental group and one to the control. I used this non-equivalent control group design for the experiment because I wanted to work with intact classes, not an artificial situation. Although the nature of the "treatment" (i.e. lessons with slides) did not permit random assignment of individual students to the two groups, the assignment of treatments was randomized, and the students in both groups were similar in age, range of social classes, and mean scores on verbal tests. For purposes of this account, I shall not go into details of the experimental procedures and statistical results, but will briefly summarize what the treatment entailed.

Because I wanted to show how close observation is fundamental to the effectiveness of both visual and verbal expression, I directed students' attention to the way that professional artists and writers depict human subjects in portraiture and verbal descriptions by selecting and composing specific details. The series of lessons, which the three participating teachers implemented, combined slides of portrait paintings with literary passages illustrating analogous techniques. The point I hoped would come across to students was that these techniques were also available to them as writers.

The lessons for the experimental group were introduced with an over-view of the development of portraiture as visual biography, an art which has repeatedly fluctuated between romantic idealization of the subject and attempts at verisimilitude. Slides of stylized sculpture from the early Egyptian dynasties were contrasted to the life-like mummy portraits from the Ptolemaic era; the classic, idealized heads of Apollo and Athena were compared to the battered faces of gladiators and beggars from Hellenistic times. Works by Renaissance and Baroque artists were used as examples of individualized portraiture which not only reflected the artist's observation of a particular subject rather than an idealized type, but revealed the "motions of the mind." Portraits by Titian served to illustrate the tendency to subordinate physical characteristics in order to romanticize inner qualities, whereas Rembrandt's series of introspective self-portraits, recording his face as it changed from confident, richly-clothed youth to melancholy, plainly-garbed old age, provided examples of the heightening of physical details to intensify the viewer's sense of penetrating into the sitter's psyche.

In the sessions that followed, students considered the varying ways that painters and writers have chosen to flatter their sitters by improving on nature according to current tastes, to depict them honestly yet sympathetically, or to view them with clinical detachment, sometimes even contempt. The sessions were organized around procedures for creating individualized portraits: differentiating the particular individual from a type by selecting significant details, then arranging these details to create emphasis, and employing devices such as rhythm, color, or exaggeration to communicate a dominant impression. The students were presented with the problem of how to achieve rounded, not flat, characters in their own descriptive writing, while avoiding a boring catalogue of background information, personality traits, and physical attributes. A solution to this problem was discussed in terms of communicating an impression of a personality by selecting a few significant details that give both clues to the complexities of character and reflect an attitude toward the subject. Instead of making one trait represent a complete person or providing an exhaustive list of characteristics, the artist may use only one detail, perhaps some aspect of dress, an object, or a physical feature, to suggest all the necessary information.

For example, in a portrait of the conqueror of Gibraltar, Lord Heathfield, Reynolds shows him holding a symbolic key, a detail that carries an ennobling allusion to St. Peter. On the other hand, Goya implies disillusionment with such militaristic heroism when he portrays the sensitive, frightened face of the young Duke of Wellington attached to a torso arrayed with medals. A sitter's features may be subordinated to details of dress and textures of silk, braid, and fur, as in Elizabethan portraiture, or they may be distorted surrealistically in order to reveal subconscious drives beneath outward appearances, as in Francis Bacon's contemporary portraits. Dickens uses Miss Murdstone's steel purse to reinforce her metallic personality; Willa Cather evokes Neighbor Rosicky's life and character when she describes his hand "like quick-silver, flexible, muscular, about the color of a pale cigar, with deep creases across the palm...", and Mailer leaves no doubt about his views when he caricatures Rockefeller's "catfish mouth" and Nixon's smile, "a painful kind of joyless grimace which spoke of some shrinkage in the liver."

During half of the sessions devoted to the relationship of perception to specificity, students in both the experimental and control groups were given the same verbal exercises, but on alternative days the experimental group looked at the slides of portraits (most of them were acquired from the National Gallery in London). The control group spent an equal amount of time on the topic of specificity while doing additional exercises in inferring character from details, sharpening their observations, and then organizing them for special effects. One of these exercises was suggested by Sherlock Holmes' cleverness in inferring a man's character and background by simply examining his bowler hat ("The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle").

Students were given a list of assorted contents of a woman's purse and assigned an exercise requiring them to infer the appearance, age, social position, personality, and activities of its owner.

To determine whether the use of the slides was a more effective teaching device than relying solely on verbal examples, I measured results of the session by collecting compositions written before the instruction began and after it had been concluded. In these compositions students described people who they had been asked to observe carefully. Their papers were coded and randomly assigned to teachers for grading and to trained raters for scoring according to a "level of specificity" scale that sorted types of descriptive sentences into eight levels ranging from the general to the specific. Raters scored the first twelve sentences on each paper by matching them to examples on the scale. Although this scale did not provide as objective a measurement as some kind of frequency count would have, it was a relatively objective and reliable measure to compare with the teachers' grades for global effectiveness. The teachers were unaware of the basis on which the raters were scoring the papers, but, of course, they knew that it was related in some fashion to the classwork of the previous weeks. A third measurement I used was students' attitude toward the sessions, the extent to which they found each portion to be either interesting or helpful or both.

The data were subjected to an analysis of covariance with pretest grade and specificity score as covariates and posttest grade and score as dependent variables. An analysis of variance was used to the interest and helpfulness ratings for those sessions which differed between the experimental and control groups (i.e., when the experimental group saw the slides).

I found that significantly more students in the experimental group improved their specificity scores than did those in the control group, the average score on the pretest composition having been doubled on the posttest, although this group average was not sufficiently higher than that of the control group to be statistically significant. Specificity scores correlated significantly with teachers' grades, a finding that confirmed my assumption that increasing specificity would improve the quality of writing. Ratings by students for all sessions showed that apparently those with slides were consistently more successful in terms of interest and helpfulness than those without them. Not surprisingly, interest ratings were highly correlated with helpfulness ratings.

In addition to finding out whether instruction with visual material would encourage students to be more observant and to record what they noticed in specific terms, I was interested in learning how students of below-average verbal ability (as measured by SAT scores) would respond to the sessions with slides. I discovered that on the average they improved their specificity

scores and grades more than did students of high verbal ability, and their interest and helpfulness ratings were also higher. On the other hand, they evaluated the verbal material less favorably than did the high-ability group. Thus, I concluded that it was the students who were less skillful verbally who benefited most from an approach to writing which used visual images to focus their attention and to demonstrate some tangible ways to express themselves.

The over-all increase in the use of specific details and modifiers in the compositions indicated that most of the students were able to apply the stylistic principles which were stressed in the experiment. In cases where their posttest papers received a low grade for effectiveness but a high score for specificity, the students had enumerated details without any subordination for emphasis and had failed to unify their observations around a central impression. I think that this failure in organizing their compositions indicates an early stage in the development of their writing ability. As Rudolf Arnheim has pointed out in reference to the evolution of a sense of form in children's drawing, the capacity to think in terms of a total, unifying form marks a late stage in the mastery of an art. The observer-artist moves through a sequence of stages from early generalized forms, to gradual differentiation and recognition of variations from the type, to organization of an integrated complexity. Using art in teaching writing appears to be an effective way that teachers can help their students take a few steps in this sequence.

Visual and Verbal Exposition: Integrating Animation Techniques with the Writing Program

Jonathan Lovell

The first question to ask of any writing program, as of the relation of a writing program to the larger English curriculum, is its purpose. What skills, abilities, or perceptions is it designed to teach, and how do these relate to the writing and writing-related experiences that will confront students when they have completed their formal schooling? Given the known variety of such experiences and their unpredictable nature for any given student, it is advisable for a writing program to stress a certain amount of diversity in its offerings. Borrowing an insight from current attitudes toward reading at the elementary level, it should also be realized that a student who seems unaffected by one approach to writing may benefit substantially from a quite different program, whether "traditional" or "innovative" in conception.

It is in this spirit of diversity that I would like to offer the following suggestions on some of the possibilities for interrelating animation techniques with the writing program at the secondary level. The program as I will outline it in the following pages was initially conceived with the tenth-grade students who formed the bulk of my high school teaching duties in mind, but it was subsequently taught successfully to seventh through twelfth grade students, both disadvantaged and privileged, in groups ranging from two to sixty. I believe that the elements of the program could also be introduced at lower and higher grade and age levels.

My interest in the relevance of teaching animation in the English classroom grew quite directly out of questions I had about the purpose and value of introducing high school students to filmed versions of shorter and longer works of fiction. In the tenth grade classes I was then teaching (1969-72), the students became familiar, as countless similar classes still do, with such works as Contemporary Film's rendition of Ambrose Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" and UPA's animated version of James Thurber's "The Unicorn in the Garden." The purpose of these films was partly to introduce a bit of variety into the English program, awakening interest and helping, hopefully, to overcome the inertia some students felt toward reading works of fiction, but there was a writing emphasis as well. The class would frequently be asked to use the film for what today would be called a pre-writing exercise, observing, for example,

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the way the film prepared its viewers for its most dramatic moments, and using these observations as a basis for writing about the differences between the viewing and reading experience of the passages in question. These assignments seemed to me both enjoyable and valuable, by and large. I recall one particularly memorable term, in fact, when I asked about forty-five students to conclude a unit on the short story with a detailed comparison between Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" and Ted Parmelee's 1953 animated version of the story, another product from the early, innovative years at the United Productions of America studios. The resulting papers were lively and provocative, but in order to study the film carefully it had been necessary to allow students to view it repeatedly, with frequent stops and starts, and I fear that neither the projector nor UPS's print of the film were ever quite the same again.

What was missing in such an approach, however, was a thoroughgoing and fundamental attention to the distinguishing characteristics of the visual and verbal media with which we were dealing. There was, clearly, a more important and pervasive relationship between visual and verbal modes of communication that was not being addressed by our exclusive attention to filmed versions of short stories. And there ought to be a more responsible and less reductive way of approaching this relationship, I felt, than what we were doing--essentially using films to help overcome an anticipation of a student's reluctance to make the effort to read and write about a work of fiction. Should it now be possible to integrate the study of visual "exposition" more thoroughly with the emphasis on written exposition in the English classroom? And to return to the initial question of my essay, were there not more fundamental skills involved in learning to deal with visual and verbal modes of communication, skills which would allow the student to relate his or her understanding to a broader range of future endeavors? It was in an effort to begin an exploration of these questions that the following animation program was conceived.

I began with the assumption that one of the fundamental characteristics of an effective mode of exposition, whether visual or verbal, was the care with which the salient features of a given presentation, fictional or informational, were selected and developed. In short stories, this characteristic was evidenced in the attention a writer of fiction gave to his opening paragraphs, which I had been in the habit of emphasizing throughout the short story unit. In essay writing, whether expository or creative, I had asked students to exercise a similar attentiveness with their own opening sentences. What was the most important feature of their argument or narrative, and how might they define and present this concept or descriptive element in a manner that would be most convincing to another reader? In the most memorable film presentations, an equivalent process of selection was at work, I felt, in the choice of initial visual elements--both their arrangement within a frame and their frame to frame relationships.

To convey the importance of initial selection and development in a visual sequence, I asked students to think of a simple action they wished to convey--whether something as realistic as skipping rope or as abstract as an "exploding" frame--and to break down this action into a series of about a dozen or so still images. These still images were then drawn onto the bottom half of 3 X 5 note cards, placed bottom to top, and bound with an elastic band to form an elementary "flip-book." The resulting works of simple animation, flipped with the thumb, demonstrated what gives any sequence of filmed images their appearance of motion--the phenomenon of persistence of vision, in which the eye interrelates a series of momentarily perceived sequential images to create what appears to be continuous motion. As a comparison of similar animated actions in different flip-books demonstrated, however, the success or failure of such an attempt depended on the student's ability to isolate the crucial stages in any action and to represent them boldly and economically. For students who had never experienced this simple visual device, these comparative examples were quite intriguing. For those who had, however, and felt that this initial exercise was unnecessarily elementary, it was emphasized that such flip-sequences are used continually by professional animators to provide them with the equivalent of the professional writer's rough draft: they give an indication of the effectiveness of an idea before it is refashioned into its final, polished form.

I should explain at this point that my reasons for choosing animation techniques to demonstrate interrelationships between visual and verbal modes of exposition rested on both theoretical and practical grounds. In theoretical terms, I felt there was a more readily understandable correlation, at least initially, between "putting together" an animated sequence and relating sentences together to form a paragraph, and paragraphs together to form an essay. I also felt that students ought to have some first-hand experience working with visual media, rather than constantly responding to external, "professional" products. Introducing an animation program offered what I found to be an extremely manageable, instructive, and enjoyable approach to such interrelationships, while providing the not inconsiderable advantage of accommodating itself to the time schedule and materials of the high school English classroom.

But back to basics: having introduced students to a simple form of sequential visual action, the next step was to indicate how this elementary structure could be expanded into a more complicated and compelling visual narrative. For this purpose, I turned briefly from the students' own productions to more sophisticated work, since my intention was to give some indication of the potential range and evocative power of a more extended series of sequential images. The example I chose was perhaps unnecessarily extreme, but its familiarity provided a degree of both surprise and engagement. For their second exercise, therefore, the students were presented in class with photo-copies of an episode from a comic book story by Stan Lee (Marvel Comics). Lee's balloon captions had been erased, however, leaving only

the "pure" visual narrative of Marvel's illustrator-artist John Romita. The object of the exercise was to re-create a verbal narrative or basic plot outline based on the visual action of the series of frames alone. The purpose was not to have students duplicate the deliberately funky exaggerations of Lee's narrative, but rather to have them experience the manner in which the visual composition of frames in sequence can be used to create a narrative language with considerable coherence and suggestive power. Since the essence of a good comic book frame lies in its ability to indicate and suggest a maximum amount of narrative action, moreover, the exercise was also used to re-confirm the emphasis of the initial assignment on the economy and care with which given visual elements can be introduced for telling dramatic effect.

Since the comic book narrative was of a considerably more sophisticated nature, in visual terms, than the initial animated sequences drawn by students, I found it useful at this point to introduce some "grammatical concepts," borrowed from film terminology but related to exercises in written composition, to help describe the nature and effect of some of the basic techniques of visual exposition. These terms were classified briefly as those functioning like coordinating phrases and clauses, helping to give overall organization and coherence to the visual exposition, and those whose primary purpose was to lend particular and distinctive emphasis, like adjectives, adverbs, and the various strategies for achieving verbal emphasis, to the individual units--the frames--that made up the larger exposition. In the former category, I asked students to distinguish between frames which established the setting in which the action was taking place, those which presented only the principal characters or objects performing the action, and those which focused on specific aspects of these characters or objects. To these classifications, primarily designating the nature of spatial and temporal progressions in the visual exposition, I added the indispensable concept of "cutting" from one frame to another--the "meanwhile back at the ranch" device--to indicate the manner in which two independent but related actions could be juxtaposed in a visual narrative to hasten the exposition or increase the viewer's sense of suspense. The principal distinctions I made in the latter category were between three easily recognizable angles or "points of view" from which the action of any frame could be presented--low angle, high angle, and straight on. Since one of the trademarks of Marvel comics is their delight in presenting their characters from bizarre and unconventional perspectives, the caption-less frames of the Marvel comic book episode provided an excellent opportunity to explore how these variations in the angle of perception affected the viewer's response to the action being presented in the frame.

Armed with a provocative new visual "grammar," the next step was to introduce students to the mechanism that was to make possible the exposition of their own visual sequences--the movie camera. For this purpose, I asked each student to select an inanimate object as the focus of a twenty-second film. In order

to liven things up a bit, however, I asked that they reverse the usual visual progression from establishment shot to close-up, so that the full nature and extent of the object would only be revealed in the final frames of filming. They should attempt to create, I suggested, a short visual essay whose purpose would be to intimate the nature of their object through a series of carefully selected and perhaps deliberately unconventional views of its attributes. The resulting films were in effect visual equivalents of the favorite Victorian parlor game of "charades," in which the questioner would enigmatically describe each syllable of a word to be guessed by the participants. I required, however, that the preparation for these short sequences be quite rigorous. The initial planning of the shooting script was to be done with camera and watch, but without film. When the most effective organization, both for visual progressions, angles, and overall pacing of the twenty-second presentation had been determined, I asked that this be written down, with rough sketches to indicate camera angles and seconds of filming time for each point of view. I also found that it was quite helpful to have students work in pairs on this assignment, in order to both aid and critique one another's work. This procedure seemed to both help students generate new ideas, and to make them more aware of the strengths and limitations of their initial conceptions. Like "charades," moreover, it was the sort of exercise that built up a good deal of momentum when it became a social event as well as an individual assignment.

I must arrest the flow and momentum of my own account at this point, however, to note that I was only able to introduce the above assignment in my final year of secondary level teaching. The reason was simple: I believed that the teaching effectiveness of such an exercise would be substantially reduced by any delay in processing these first films made by the students, and I did not have access to a processing plant that could guarantee prompt development and return of the film. I finally solved this practical problem in a manner that is bound to seem rather extreme at first, and I would therefore like to take a moment to argue not only for its feasibility, but also for its centrality, as I now see it, to the enterprise of introducing students to their own capacities for visual and verbal expression. My solution, as obvious as it was disconcerting, was that we learn to develop the movie film ourselves. Obvious because it meant that films completed on one day could have a guaranteed showing the very next day, and disconcerting because I had never so much as seen the inside of a darkroom, much less ever understood the magical transformations that went on inside. All this changed, of course, and in the process I became acquainted with the wide range of equipment and techniques that have been available for upwards of thirty-five years to what are apparently thousands of individuals, all still unknown to me, who process movies in their own homes. The practice has now become sufficiently popular, in fact, that the principal distributor of home processing equipment--Superior Bulk Film Company, 442 North Wells Street, Chicago, Illinois 60610--now sells a complete super-8 processing kit, including such extra dividends as a cartridge opener, apron, squeegee, and instruction book. Without going too painstakingly

into details, which those interested can obtain from Superior, I shall limit myself to observing that 1) the process is quite learnable, even for a fearful and blundering amateur, 2) takes about one to two hours, depending on experience for each 50 foot roll of film--the object essays of about twelve students, that is, and 3) perhaps most importantly, can be accomplished with eminently satisfactory results by the students themselves. As an example of the advantages of this approach, during an animation workshop I conducted for five weeks to fifty students, we were able to process about forty-five cartridges of super-8 movie film--about three hours continuous showing time--primarily during school hours, with about half the students participating in the processing of their own films. Having already purchased the developing tank (\$25), all this was done with a set of chemicals costing about four and a half dollars (now \$4.65 from Superior).

After turning to self-processing as a practical expedient, however, I found that it helped to instill an attitude toward the creation of the filmed product that I was delighted to observe, and which I believe to be worth some effort and inconvenience to retain. The attitude was quite simply pride in a work that had been pre-planned, filmed, and developed all on one's own. In spite of the relative lack of sophistication of our equipment--we used the least expensive movie camera on the market (then the Kodak M34 Instamatic) and filmed with an easy-to-process, high-speed black and white movie film throughout the program--the students watched one another's 20 second object films with rapt attention. This sort of engagement, I believe, would be sufficiently impaired if the films had to be sent out for professional processing, thereby losing the invaluable sense of personal and unique possession of the created product.

So much for the in-school movie processing polemic; now back to the program. For the fourth exercise I asked students to return from the heady world of live-action filming to their initial work in animating an action by depicting its successive stages in a sequence of frames. Rather than returning to the flip-books, however, this time we utilized a more sophisticated viewing device known as a zoetrope. This Victorian visual "machine" consisted, in our contemporary reconstruction, of a plywood disk base (2' diameter), a cylindrical rim of poster board whose upper half was slotted at regular intervals, and a mount with lazy susan bearings to enable it to be spun. An illustration and account of the nature of this device can be found in Ernest Lindgren's The Art of Film (Collier, pp. 24-27). Lengths of stripping were then taped together to circle the inside circumference of the zoetrope, and marked off with as many squares as there were slits in the cylindrical wall of the viewing device. The animated action, when depicted on this sequence of squares, was then viewed through the slits as the zoetrope was manually spun. The advantage of such a mechanism lies in its capacity to dramatize the basic elements of stimulating motion from a sequence of framed images. The manner in which the zoetrope provides the viewer with a glimpse of an

initial image, followed by an eclipse of this image, followed in turn by a new, slightly altered image, reproduces in a simplified and clearly observable fashion precisely what a movie projector does when it transforms a series of still images into a motion picture.

The zoetrope strips could not be patterned on the visual exposition of the comic book episodes studied in the second exercise, however, since the circular operation of the mechanism meant that the most effective presentations would have to return, in their action, to their point of origin. To accommodate for this difference, I asked students to treat this forth exercise as if they were turning, briefly, from expository writing to the creation of a short poem. The principles of careful selection and economy of presentation still obtained, but now the works would be designed to be viewed, as a short poem is read, over and over again. The closest visual model for such an enterprise, I suggested, was perhaps the short (30 second) television commercial, which is also created with the knowledge that it will be viewed repeatedly--one reason that ads tend to be more interesting visually than other T.V. programming. For the purposes of the assignment, this emphasis on a repeatable action meant that each frame, like each word of a short poem, had to be carefully considered in terms of its relation to the whole sequence. It would not be possible to utilize, except in rudimentary fashion, the procedures for establishing a coherent overall visual exposition learned in the second and third exercises, but the reexamination of the interrelationship of a limited number of sequential frames would help to focus the student's attention, I felt, on the value and effectiveness of careful, controlled exposition. To give some sense of the variety of options within this ostensibly limited field, I asked students to create actions, whether of abstract or realistic character, which moved from side to side, top to bottom, and in to out, while still "beginning again" at their conclusion. The resulting sequences were often quite ingenious, the better ones tending toward the abstract, and seemed to provide an almost endless source of fascination. Another unlooked for advantage of the work with the zoetrope, moreover, was the "public" nature of all the students' work. One could observe a sequence being spun through the zoetrope from almost any point in the room, and these shared experiences tended to stimulate and broaden each individual student's sense of his or her own capacities.

Turning finally to the first work of filmed animation for the fifth exercise, my purpose was to familiarize students with the nature of the animation process by using the simplest, most fundamental techniques and materials. I therefore asked the students to work only with a piece of black yarn on a white background, with which they were to devise a means of introducing the yarn, have it perform an action, and finally exit. Ideas could be pre-tested with the flip-books or the zoetrope, and I again required that all presentations be carefully worked out in a shooting script before any actual filming took place. While the relatively sophisticated terms and procedures for visual

organization learned earlier were still not specifically applicable at this point, the presentation did involve the basic structure of an introduction, a developmental section, and a conclusion, familiar to students from their studies in simple paragraphing. By creating a coherent visual presentation out of such basic, non-representational materials, moreover, it was hoped that the broader applicability of the principles stressed in both visual and verbal expository exercises would be understood.

In order to film the yarn sequence, I again used the simple instamatic movie cameras* used for the object essays, but for this assignment it was necessary to have the cameras held steadily in place, aimed downward at the framed area in which the yarn was to "perform." Accordingly, we cleared out a space in the back of the classroom and located several tripods. By inverting the center poles with their screw mounts, attaching the camera, and pointing its lens downward, we were able to create reasonably steady animation stands, with the framed areas located between the tripods' feet on the classroom floor. The cameras had fixed focus, which meant that any object filmed closer than about five feet would appear blurred, so we had to be sure to set the cameras high enough above the frames to get a clear picture. The cameras also had non-reflex viewing--what we saw through the viewer was not precisely what the camera saw--so we made the frame somewhat smaller than the viewer's frame and surrounded it with black construction paper in order to merge with the "black" screen when the film was later shown. For the filming itself, daylight or a single 75 watt floodlamp provided sufficient lighting for the Tri-X film, and in order to shoot the film the triggers were lightly touched between every small movement of the yarn, capturing two to four still images for each successive stage of the action. This method was perfectly capable of producing a fully "believable" animated sequence, generally requiring about one hundred and twenty taps on the trigger to complete a twenty second sequence, as there are 18 still images for each second of projection time with super-8 silent film. While shooting so many bursts of film unquestionably required both patience and practice, the amount of time and ingenuity that went into planning the yarn sequences helped to sustain the students through the long process, and once again teamwork and cooperation made the projects a good deal easier and far more enjoyable.

I have stressed the feasibility, as well as the difficulties, of using the least expensive camera equipment in the above account in order to demonstrate the accessibility of the filmmaking experience as part of the English curriculum. What I wish to emphasize as clearly as possible is that with a modest initial budget--enough for two cameras, a developing tank and chemicals, and a few super-8 black and white film cartridges (\$3 each from Superior Bulk Film Co.)--any English teacher can begin to include

*The best buy this fall is the GAF instamatic, sold mainly in large discount department stores. It is now at sale prices (\$40-45) due to GAF's withdrawal from the photo equipment field.

filmmaking as an integral classroom activity. With animation work as the center of such a film program, moreover, the cost of film footage will be minimized while what is produced will tend to be both carefully prepared and intriguing to watch.

Anxious to design a simple animation project that would retain the visual coherence of the yarn sequences, but utilize somewhat more sophisticated principles of visual exposition, I turned for the sixth exercise to the most omnipresent piece of equipment in any classroom--the chalkboard. Setting the cameras on tripods about five feet from the chalkboard, and once again making sure the frames were somewhat smaller than the viewfinders' range and surrounded with black construction paper, I asked students to create a thirty-second sequence (about 180 trigger bursts) which made use of the principles of visual coherence and emphasis studied in the comic book narrative. The advantage of the chalkboard as an animation medium, of course, was that it eliminated the tedium of entirely redrawing each new image, as one had to with the zoetrope strips, since the moving parts had only to be chalked, erased, and rechalked. Another unanticipated advantage of the medium was that it emphasized the plastic, fluid nature of the graphic representation of all animation work. Titles could appear letter by letter marching across the frame, and even the smudge marks of the eraser could take on an animated life of their own. For particularly ambitious projects, moreover, it was possible to turn to the more dramatic effects of color, using colored chalks and "existing light" movie cameras. For initial projects, however, I found it was best to stick with black and white, and it was essential to remind students of the continuing importance of a clear, quickly understandable exposition.

The emphasis in all the animation exercises up through the chalkboard animation sequences had been on establishing correlations between the procedures used for achieving coherence in both visual and verbal modes of exposition. For the final assignment, I asked teams of students to relate these two modes more directly by creating extended silhouette films with overlaid sound tracks. Using cut-out black cardboard figures flattened against a piece of white plastic sheeting (used generally for diffusing overhead lighting), I asked the groups to create a three and one half to four minute presentation, with either an informational or fictional narration, which would be filmed live as the students manipulated the shadow puppets with dowel sticks from behind the "screen," and correlated with a pre-written sound track after the film was developed.* The resulting works ran the gamut from an irreverent treatment of the tortoise and hare fable to an incredibly detailed account of beavers in their habitat. At this point in the program I let the student

*The most dependable method of correlating sound and film is to have the developed film "stripped" for sound pick-up--a procedure which can now be done non-professionally with equipment from Superior. A spoken narration can then be overlaid on the film during projection with a super-8 sound projector.

teams supervise themselves, each member of the group being assigned a different function from cutting the puppets to developing the film. Interest and enthusiasm were high, and I was impressed with the variety and vitality of the results produced.

Will the utilization of animation and animation-related techniques help students write more and write better? If the question is asked in somewhat larger terms, I think such a program can contribute significantly to the improvement of student writing. What must be overcome is not merely an antipathy to writing, I believe, but more generally an intense awareness on the part of students of the manipulative uses to which both visual and verbal modes of communication have been put in our society. The history and development of Mad magazine, with its target audience steadily dropping in age from the late teens to what is now primarily the nine to eleven year old market, offers a case-study in the earlier and earlier age periods at which our students become aware, or think they become aware, of the nature and extent of the society's commercial uses of visual and verbal modes of exposition. Television is certainly a contributing factor to this association of verbal and visual expression with unreliable, crassly manipulative adult hype, but it is more likely endemic to what the followers of Piaget term conceptual conceit--the belief that the self-defined realities of one's own perceptual system are the only true realities. Television merely prolongs this attitude well into adolescence by providing a continuous and apparent demonstration of the falsity of the adult world.

No single program, clearly, is going to overcome a deeply held, continually reinforced distrust of the most frequently manipulated of adult forms of communication--words and visual images. By consciously avoiding the format and even the subjects of most film and television programming, however, and by concentrating instead on the fundamental processes, the inherent structures, that give basic coherence to both visual and verbal modes of exposition, I believe it is possible to give students a new, revitalized sense of their own power over what they can express and how they can express it. By giving the students, that is, the skills and resources with which they can create works of an expository nature that are truly their own, the easiest transition of all becomes the translation of this awareness into an improved facility with that newly trustworthy partner, the written word.

Writing and Teaching Writing-- Interviews With Two Adolescent Novelists

Donald R. Gallo

Most professional writers write rather than teach writing because writing is what they do best. Nevertheless, professional writers can describe writing experiences they had as students, and--as people who write almost daily--they can provide insights into the writing act which may help teachers to be more sensitive, more understanding, more appreciative of their students' writing problems and successes. The Connecticut English Journal therefore interviewed, through a series of written questions, two prominent and popular writers of books for teenagers: Bette Greene and Norma Klein. A resident of Brookline, Massachusetts, Bette Greene is best known for her Summer of My German Soldier, the sequel to which--Morning Is a Long Time Coming--is to be published soon. Many readers are also familiar with her Newbery Honor Book: Philip Hall Likes Me. I Reckon Maybe. Norma Klein, who lives in New York City, has written numerous books for children, adolescents, and adults, among which are Confessions of an Only Child; Sunshine; Mom, the Wolfman, and Me; It's Not What You Expect; Taking Sides; and Give Me One Good Reason.

CEJ: From the standpoint of maturity and writing success, can you now look back at your youth and see a clear pattern of interest in and talent for writing at an early age? If not, when did you start writing seriously, and what were the major influences on you?

BETTE GREENE: The first encouragement that I ever received came from my third grade teacher Miss Ada Norsworthy who wrote in my autograph book that I told good stories and that she was sure that I could be a comedienne if that was what I wished to do.

NORMA KLEIN: I was always seriously interested in writing, although, until my late teens, I was equally interested in painting. I felt I couldn't continue with the same intensity with both, but painting and more recently photography are still major passions with me. I went to progressive schools and since fifth grade had really marvelous English teachers. The first assignment I remember was in 4th or 5th grade where we were asked to describe a small straw Mexican donkey to someone who couldn't see it. My teachers always encouraged me and I felt very close to them. There was a lot of creative writing, mainly short themes on any topic we wanted. My parents were intellectuals and my father, who was a

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psychoanalyst, wanted to write himself so I was given perhaps an overdose of encouragement at home.

CEJ: What writing experiences in school were most meaningful to you then as a student? And what writing experiences then have been meaningful, helpful, influential to you now as a writer?

BETTE GREENE: I loved all assignments where I could express my own opinions, gripes, biases, affections and solutions. In those days, I had solutions for everything except varicose veins and with only a bit of encouragement, I'm certain that I'd have thrown myself into seeking a solution for that.

NORMA KLEIN: I went to a private high school also, Elizabeth Irwin, and had there the teacher who was the most influential in my writing career. He was the kind of teacher who was ruthless and unkind with inferior students so I don't think he was remembered universally with pleasure. But to those who were interested, he was tremendously exciting. He communicated a wonderful enthusiasm about writers he liked. I was always interested in writing from a critical point of view. I could easily have become a college teacher, gotten a doctorate and gone on to write articles or books about other writers. I still love reading novels and read several hundred a year. However, this teacher also requested frequent themes, mini short stories and used to write excellent criticisms of what I'd done. When I was in college, I had two or three writing teachers who became friends--the poet W. D. Snodgrass but, more particularly, the short story writer and novelist, George P. Elliott. At that time I began submitting short stories to magazines. My first story, published when I was nineteen in a little magazine now defunct, was "Ceremony of Innocence" and was based on Lewis Carroll--it was about a middle-aged bachelor who liked to take photos of little girls in the nude.

CEJ: Which particular writers have influenced your writing, and did they influence you when you were a teenager?

BETTE GREENE: I loved Edna St. Vincent Millay, Thomas Wolfe (the original not the current one), Scott Fitzgerald, Radcliffe Hall, and The Reader's Digest.

NORMA KLEIN: A writer who influenced me from high school on was Hemingway. The simplicity of his style, especially in his early stories, attracted me. I still prefer the kind of writer whose style is unobtrusive. I liked reading plays a great deal--Shaw was my favorite and I still think I may try writing plays or adapting my novels to plays someday soon. What appealed to me in Shaw was his interest in social issues--I have that too--combined

with an entertaining and witty style which had popular appeal. Probably the most significant influence on me at that time and for ten years afterward was the Russian short story writer and playwright, Anton Chekhov. Everything about him struck a tremendous chord of response in me--his outlook on life, his humor, his sadness. Probably because of him I lingered too long--until my early thirties--writing short stories, since I now feel novels are more my forte. Also, due to him, I attempted getting a doctorate in Slavic Languages which was a foolish and insane mistake and wasted several years when I was in my early twenties. At around the age of twenty-five I discovered Jane Austen and she has remained one of my all time favorites--again the simplicity of plot, the wit, all appeal to me.

CEJ: Are there particular writers that you would encourage teenagers as future writers to read?

BETTE GREENE: Asking me what writer I would suggest for young people is a lot like asking Frank Perdue whose chickens he prefers.

NORMA KLEIN: If I were a high school teacher, I'd encourage kids to read as widely as possible, classics as well as contemporary literature. Many of the teachers I've spoken to simply don't read widely enough themselves. When a student who's finished Catcher in the Rye comes to them for more suggestions, they draw a blank. As a woman writer, I think it's terribly important for young women who are would-be writers to be aware of the tremendous renaissance in women's writing over the past ten years. I think this is a great encouragement to all women writers. I would assign writers like Margaret Drabble, Anne Tyler, Janet Burroway, Fay Weldon, etc.

CEJ: Do you have a set writing time every day, accept no phone calls, lock doors, etc.--every day?

BETTE GREENE: I write five or six days a week from 10 A.M. until 4 P.M. I do take phone calls because I have discovered that I worry about unanswered rings.

NORMA KLEIN: I have a peculiar writing schedule. At least I think it's different from most other writers I know. As I mentioned, for ten years I wrote and published short stories and kept getting letters from editors, saying, "When are you going to write a novel?" I was determined to stick to my guns since I loved stories, but gradually I came to realize that this meant having no audience and never earning any money. I wasn't that unworldly. Also I was intimidated, perhaps due to having read so many 2000 page Russian novels, at the idea of a novel. I thought I had to have a "philosophy of life." Then one day--I was pregnant with my second daughter at the time--

I said to myself, "Tomorrow you are starting a novel. You are going to type ten pages a day, Monday through Friday, until you reach page 300. You have twelve hours to think up a plot." Well, somehow that method worked for me. It was like leaping into a nice cold swimming pool without knowing how to swim, but knowing that you had to figure out how to get to the other side or drown. I typed the ten pages on the typewriter, an IBM electric. All the novels I've written since--about twenty--have been done that way. I work only in the morning, usually complete the ten pages in about two hours. In the evening I reread what I've done and pencil in small changes. I don't obsess about style. I feel I've come to terms with my own deficiencies as a writer and, though I'd like to be better, they don't bother me so much. Some of the novels I've written have appeared more or less exactly as they came off the typewriter in the first draft. Others have been revised. I've been accused of being too prolific, and try filling in the time I'm not writing novels with re-typing what I've written. But I feel that for me it's better to write too much and let the less good things fall by the wayside than to forbid myself to write which I tried a few times with disastrous psychological results. I could never write all day as many writers do. I like to stop at noon, go out for lunch, meet friends, play tennis, cook. Also, perhaps because I work fast, I feel emotionally zonked after two hours and am glad to emerge from my study. Writing is a tremendous pleasure for me, not an agony as I gather it is for some writers. I feel carried away, as though I were in another world, really "high." I think it must be what drugs are like for some people, an escape.

CEJ: As a professional writer, what aspects of the writing act are most difficult for you?

BETTE GREENE: As a writer, I can tell you that all aspects of writing are difficult for me.

CEJ: If you, for some reason--by choice or circumstance--had to teach a writing course to junior or senior high school students, what kinds of writing activities would you want those students to do, and what would you want them to avoid?

BETTE GREENE: I would teach my students that what they have to express is infinitely worth expressing because they are the only ones who possess that particular grain of life that is theirs alone to illuminate. Also, I would give two grades of equal value to each composition turned in. The first grade would be the slightly more important. It would be for content and the second grade would be for grammar.

NORMA KLEIN: I've kept journals, but don't anymore. I came to feel they were a waste for me. I think as a teacher I'd encourage students to write anything and everything, starting with stories. Also, I grew up feeling the third person was the only "real" way to write. I wish I'd known about the first person which with its easy colloquialness is ideal for teenagers. The main thing is: do it. Get it down on paper. Don't be overcritical. Also, I still feel the adage about writing about what you know is good. Not that students who want to write science fiction shouldn't. But I think students should be made to feel what I think is true--that by the age of eighteen, you've had enough experiences to write about for a lifetime, no matter where you've grown up or how "sheltered" your life has been.

CEJ: English teachers have traditionally used excerpts from the publications of professional writers as examples of good writing which they want students to emulate. Those writers, traditionally, have been the literary giants of past generations. Do you see any value in English teachers using excerpts from young adult books as examples--of good description or characterization for instance? Do you have any particular feelings about your own young adult novels being used that way?

BETTE GREENE: I love having my books used in schools.

NORMA KLEIN: Yes, I'd assign young adult books if I were a teacher and feel mainly pleased when I hear my own books are being used. The main thing is to make reading as well as writing a pleasure, an addiction, if it can be. Kids need books about people their own age, going through the experiences they are going through. Anything worthwhile about teenagers should be assigned. Even if it's not such a great book, it can be stimulating because of the ideas or themes it raises. And I think many a book has been written by someone who's said, "Gee, I could do that better myself." If they don't like a particular book, let them write a chapter as they would have done it.

CEJ: In addition to what you've already indicated, what additional advice do you have for English teachers that might help them to be more effective teachers of writing?

BETTE GREENE: As a teacher of English, I think I would find something in each student worth believing in. Not necessarily praising the whole package, but finding in each student's work something worth praising and I would encourage them to believe in it and build on it. I would try to be more responsive to the ideas than to the grammar. And yet I wouldn't hesitate to inform my students that their poor punctuations are dragging down the grades of some pretty nifty writing.

NORMA KLEIN: I feel as far as creative writing goes, grammar shouldn't be emphasized as a study unto itself, but should, if possible, be woven into the general study of writing. I hated grammar and never mastered it. Despite the horrors of T.V., I don't see anything wrong with having kids watch specials about teenagers, even the bad ones, in order, once again, to lead to a discussion of the ideas involved. Let them write a scene from such a special their own way, pretending to be the central character. I think the only way to hook kids on writing is to show them the pleasure it can bring them throughout their lives. Don't emphasize what "good" it will do them. Even if they don't become writers, it can be an endless source of joy... Incidentally, I hope some day I will teach a writing course to teenagers or pre-teenagers. I think I would enjoy it.

CEJ: I'm sure the students would enjoy that too. Thank you both.

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Spelyng Maydde Sympil

R. Baird Shuman

Lest the reader be confounded, let it be said immediately that it is extremely doubtful that English spelling can be made simple. The problem lies in the fact that whereas Russian, for example, has 36 symbols for 34 basic sounds, making it approximately 90% efficient in its sound-letter relationships, English has 379 symbols for between 40 and 44 basic sounds and is 20% efficient in sound-letter relationships.¹ It is reasonable to expect that the Russian school child can spell moderately well. To expect the same of the English speaking school child is somewhat less than reasonable.

W. Nelson Francis specifies three essential reasons for the inconsistencies of English spelling:

- (1) The diverse sources of English words, preserving graphic conventions from different writing systems...
- (2) Changes which have occurred in the pronunciation and distribution of English phonemes without corresponding graphic changes...
- (3) The semimorphographic nature of our spelling, with its tendency not to represent morphophonemic changes, especially those due to gradation. This produces pairs of words which look more alike than they sound, such as history: historical... and pacify: pacific.²

In line with Francis's third point, Stephen Judy writes in Explorations in the Teaching of Secondary English, "Mechanical conventions are standardized and do not vary the way usage does."³ Simmons, Shafer, and West corroborate this statement in Decisions about the Teaching of English: "...meaning changes with speakers, regions, contexts, and time. Spellings change but slowly over a period of time, and when they do, the pattern remains much the same."⁴

A major problem that English speaking students encounter in their attempts to spell in any standard way is that the English language is full of borrowings from other languages, and these

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borrowings conform to the phonic systems of the language groups to which they belong, so that in a sentence such as "Helga parked her Mercedes coupe beside the restaurant, took a table on the verandah facing the piazza, and ordered a shish-kabob and a half litre carafe of claret," one has traveled across half the world in terms of the sound systems that the sentence employs. Lewis and Sisk remind the reader in Teaching English: 7 - 12 that "...language is speech and...spelling is the system which enables us to record meaningful sounds in language."⁵ In view of the fact that English has an estimated 36 vowel sounds alone⁶ and that these sounds must be represented by six letters--a, e, i, o, u, and y--it is not remarkable that youngsters--and adults, too--have considerable difficulty mastering English orthography.

WHY ALL THE FUSS?

When people come to understand the problems associated with English spelling, they might ask, "Why all the fuss?" Misspelling (or is it misspelling?) usually does not interfere with the comprehension of what people write. Readers who encounter "recieve" or "proffessor" or "athelete" or "accidently" or

"publically" on a written page know what the writer intends, and they read on with little difficulty, comprehending what has been said. "Spelyng maydde sympil" or "naythchoor" or "stayshun" would cause readers substantial difficulty in comprehension, but bad spellers seldom write like this. Indeed, in order to write this way, the writer has to have a rather well developed sense of phonics. Most errors in English spelling do not reduce the comprehension of what has been written, but they do reduce the reader's confidence in the writer.

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"'Comandments' is misspelled."

Writing over fifty years ago in What Is English? C. H. Ward addressed the question of why people view

standard spelling as a matter of such great importance. In his quotation which follows, the modern reader may substitute "society" for "school" wherever the word "school" appears:

...spelling...is a matter of conscience. Elsewhere in the world spelling may be a matter of knowledge, or of pride, or of resolute indifference; in school it is moral. For we pretend to teach it, the public pays us to teach it, pupils agree that they try to learn it, we all pay some deference to spelling in our social code...In school we live by a social compact, all agreeing that correct spelling of the commonest words is a social demand, that pupils have subscribed to it, that teachers have a duty to enforce it.⁷

The fuss about spelling comes from the community at large. The community tends to judge the effectiveness of English programs not on the basis of whether high school graduates understand a Shakespearean play or a poem or principles of paragraphing or means of achieving sentence variety, but rather on the basis of how well they can spell. The most obvious error in any sample of writing is a misspelled word. It jumps out at the reader. It labels the writer. It condemns the educational system which has allowed the writer to pass through without knowing that "i follows e when preceded by c," and this condemnation is not tempered by the fact that the student who writes "recieve" might indeed be a very effective and forceful writer, exploding with exciting ideas.

It is interesting that one small motel chain whose letterhead proclaimed, "Accomodations at prices you can afford," asked the placement service of a business college to send them only proficient spellers as applicants for secretarial jobs. And so many people through the years have written "accomodations" rather than "accommodations" that both forms are now quite acceptable in most instances.

It can be said, then, that standard spelling has more to do with the impression that a writer makes than with the comprehension of what the writer is trying to convey substantively.

ARE THERE ANY GOOD LISTS OF SPELLING RULES?

People who are looking for "good lists of spelling rules" are looking for absolutistic statements about spelling. They are not much interested in reading rules followed by endless exceptions. The only expert advice that one can give these people in good conscience is, "Abandon English! Master a more phonetic language like Russian or Turkish." English spelling rules are chaotic, confusing, and filled with exceptions. The best and least confusing source of such rules, stated briefly and as clearly as possible, is probably found in the section of Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary which deals with orthography. English teachers would be well advised to read this three or four page section with care before the beginning of each new

school year. If such reading achieves nothing else, it might help English teachers to improve their spelling.

IS ALL LOST?

I strenuously doubt that typical high school graduates 50 or 500 or, if English survives that long, 5,000 years from now will spell any better than their ancestors such as Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare, John Milton, Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, William Butler Yeats, Gertrude Stein, Sylvia Plath, or Samuel Beckett did. Probably 500 years from now, machines will be doing most of our spelling for us. All we need to do is find competent spellers to program the machines and to agree on what is standard and what is non-standard in spelling. The latter caveat might cause problems in the light of what Donald W. Emery revealed in his study of more than 2,400 instances of variant spellings in the most recent editions of five major desk dictionaries.⁸

This is not to suggest that all is lost. Linguists know more than ever before about spelling and about its relation to reading and writing. Teachers are benefiting from this knowledge and many are applying the fruits of it in their day-to-day teaching activities.

WHAT WORDS SHOULD WE TEACH?

If teachers are going to teach spelling from word lists--and this technique, while quite old, works well in some situations--they should make sure that the lists they are using are realistic. C. H. Ward, aforementioned, reminds the teacher that "Our language must contain several thousand potential demons. But they occur so seldom or so locally that there is no general knowledge of them. They are not standard troubles." Ward continues, "Suppose that separate occurs, on the average, three times in every thousand words of spontaneous writing and that icicle occurs only once in 20,000 words; it follows that you will accomplish sixty times as much by teaching separate as by teaching icicle. There is no question that grammar is a thousand times more important than zephyr, and that ability to form singular possessives is ten thousand times more important."⁹

The teacher needs to decide on teaching priorities in approaching spelling, particularly if spelling lists are to be used. The purpose of spelling instruction is not to prepare youngsters for spelling bees but to enable them to write and read with an ease which severe spelling problems can prevent.

TEACHER-MADE SPELLING LISTS

Teachers who can find the time to do so might obtain good results from making their own spelling lists based upon two major sources. The first source would be the textbooks, in English and in other subject areas, which the students are actually using. The second source would be student writing.

The first source is a practical one because students must cope with the words they encounter in their textbooks if they are to succeed in their school subjects. The second source is a realistic one, because it provides the teacher with actual words that students have a problem encoding. Such a list takes into account problems which result from dialectal differences which are usually not reflected in the written material that one finds in textbooks.

STUDENT-MADE SPELLING LISTS

I feel that the most effective means of teaching spelling is by encouraging students to write a great deal, telling them that they should never hesitate to use a word because they are unsure of its spelling. Also, weak spellers should be encouraged to gain as much fluency in writing as they can, and they should not run to the dictionary to look up every word they cannot spell. In doing this, they will lose their trains of thought and their writing will suffer.

I usually tell students during class writing sessions that I will circulate and help them with their spelling. I usually do this by sounding out syllable-by-syllable words which are relatively phonetically spelled. In dealing with a word like "psychology," I merely print it on a piece of paper and leave it with the child who wants to use it.

I promise students that I will deduct no credit for misspelled words that occur in their writing provided that they have circled each word they are uncertain of. I deduct credit only for misspelled words that have not been circled.

When I receive the student papers, I go through them, paying close attention to the circled words. If a circled word is spelled correctly, I mark it with a check. I then tell the students that their spelling list consists of those words which they have circled. They must learn to spell those they have misspelled and they must make sure they continue to spell correctly those circled words that they have not misspelled. On a free reading day, I test students individually on those words that are on their individual lists.

TYPEWRITING AND COPYING

Students with spelling problems sometimes show marked improvement when they are encouraged to use the typewriter in their writing. If they are set to copying material, paying especial attention to accuracy, their spelling often shows marked improvement. Similarly, I have found that very slow students take particular satisfaction in copying pages from a book, being as exact as possible when they do so. I first used this device as a very desperate beginning teacher, telling a disruptive student that she had to copy three pages of our textbook as punishment. Although I did not approve of exacting such a punishment on a student, I imposed it because I did not

know of any other way to control the student involved at that particular moment. Much to my surprise, the student, who had succeeded at nothing in my class during the first two months of school, finally found something that she could do well, and she took great pride in her accomplishment. She asked to be allowed to copy every day, and soon other slow students began copying. Competition developed among the students, and much to my dismay and delight, student spelling improved markedly and along with this improvement came improvement in my students' ability to read and write.

Not every student will benefit from typewriting and copying; however, if one is dealing with very slow students who have significant problems with spelling, this approach may provide a partial solution.

ONE FINAL STRATEGY

Students with spelling/reading/writing problems often have tattered egos. Much of their school accomplishment has been measured by what they cannot do rather than by what they can do. To work toward overcoming this difficulty, I have used successfully a technique suggested by Bertrand F. Richards.¹⁰ I ask students to count the number of words in their papers--they like to do this--and write at the end of the paper, "Words attempted: 289" or whatever the number is. Below they write, "Words spelled correctly: __," and I fill in the blank. A student should feel much better about spelling 273 words correctly in a 289 word paper than about misspelling 16 words.

A PARTING WORD

Remember, spelling is a means to an end. If it becomes an end in itself, then the priorities of English instruction have somehow become distorted. Try to help your kids learn to spell more conventionally, but do so with enough historical perspective not to be discouraged if they are slow to learn.

FOOTNOTES

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Does Spelling Count?

Rose M. Feinberg

Spelling has received varying degrees of emphasis over the past ten years, which may be a major contributing factor to the "decline" in spelling ability decried by many educators and parents. There have been many other reasons provided for students' decline in spelling skills compared to previous years. In addition to less emphasis in the classroom on spelling accuracy and a general societal shift to oral means of communication, researchers cite the decreased opportunities in the classroom for students to practice spelling skills in actual writing contexts.

Evidently, current attitudes toward writing skills are prompting a greater emphasis on spelling performance. It is not yet clear whether spelling accuracy is being sought primarily in testing situations or in all written situations. When a spelling test is given, one never hears, "Does spelling count?" because the answer is obvious. When students are asked to write (both creative expression and in specific subject areas), however, they often do raise the question whether spelling counts because the answer will not only vary from subject to subject but from teacher to teacher of the same subject.

The development of a spelling conscience has been cited by many as the premise for helping students become good spellers. With a spelling conscience, a person sees accurate spelling as a basic courtesy to the reader and has a desire to spell correctly so that the written message is clear to the reader. Reinforcement of spelling conscience by teachers need not stifle creative efforts or penalize poor spellers, but only reinforce interest in efforts to spell accurately. If such an attitude were fostered through all the grades and subject areas, students would feel that spelling "counts" as a courtesy whenever they write something to be read by others (not only by the teacher).

One technique for reinforcing spelling conscience has students read stories with many spelling errors which distort the clarity of the message and meaning of the author. Students may discuss the value of accurate spelling in terms of impressions made in life and future job possibilities. It would be important to reinforce the idea that many intelligent and gifted people have difficulty spelling; but that with the tools and alternative resources to present their ideas accurately, spelling errors do not handicap them.

With the building of a spelling conscience should come the opportunity for students to improve their spelling skills in

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meaningful contexts. The most effective approach to improving students' spelling in their writing is to provide extensive opportunities for writing. It is within the realistic context of using writing to communicate to others that students should grow and be evaluated in spelling.

Spelling power grows with the ability to proofread and edit writing. Students must recognize their spelling errors before they can correct them. Errors due to carelessness are easiest to correct, since the spelling is known by the student. In cases where students used words they did not know how to spell, spelling reference tools (including human references) can be utilized. In no case should a student be discouraged from using words she or he can't spell. As James Moffett points out, students who write a lot and with pleasure will make many mistakes for the simple reason that they dare spell every word they can say. The teacher's role is to provide students with tools so that spelling guesses are as educated as possible.

It is evident that no one spelling approach will prove effective with all students. For this reason, it is important to utilize a variety of techniques when helping students gain the spelling tools they need. The most important spelling tool students can gain is the ability to diagnose and correct their own spelling errors. The following approaches are suggested to help gain this tool.

A number of researchers contend that using spelling lists is the best approach for improving students' performance on spelling tests. What often happens, however, is that a student may do well on the test but then doesn't connect the skill to daily written work. A bridge must be built from the words studied to their application in writing. After all, don't we "teach" spelling for the purpose of accuracy in writing?

Part of the bridge to application of accurate spelling in daily contexts is built by some students through spelling conscience or a basic ability to spell correctly. The other part of the bridge can be built by having students do writing which not only includes spelling being studied but also provides the spelling words to be studied.

Using students' own writing to create spelling lists is often referred to as a personalized spelling approach. The words are those which a student has used or wishes to use in written communication and which have given her or him some problems. This approach has been found effective by many but takes more time to implement than a published list of words and accompanying exercises. The teacher and student work together to find the spelling errors and patterns of errors made by the student when writing. This individualized approach enables the teacher to assist the student in focusing on individual spelling difficulties rather than on the entire range of possible errors spellers can make. An advantage here is that the student is concentrating on words she or he wishes to use and which are of particular interest, thus providing incentive for study.

A general approach to using personalized spelling may be described in steps. First, the student proofreads the paper he or she has written and underlines spelling errors obvious to him or her. These errors are noted for patterns and the words are corrected to the extent possible by the student using reference tools. In many cases, a peer can be an excellent second proofreader, with the teacher being final reader, providing correct spelling where needed. In all cases, corrections on the paper are made by the student so she or he may realize where the error was made and reinforce the accurate spelling of the word. The corrected words are recorded to become the student's personalized spelling list. The purpose of analyzing errors is to find the patterns of errors made. This aspect of diagnosis enables the student to self-diagnose in many cases and helps the teacher focus on error patterns with both individuals and groups.

Packaged spelling programs are not as highly recommended as the personalized approach. Because all students do not exhibit the same spelling problems, packaged programs often bore some students, frustrate others and take valuable time which could be better used on student writing and the diagnosis of individual problems. If a particular program is mandated for use, then variations should be considered which integrate components of a personalized approach. In place of some words from the program, students could use personal spelling words, particularly if they fall into the same or a similar pattern as the words required. Exercises from the program could be used with those students who exhibit a particular error pattern which might be corrected by the exercise.

Another approach which can be integrated with personalized lists or with a packaged spelling program is a sentence spelling dictation method. Using this approach over a number of years, I found it effective for improving not only spelling but also developing better sentences. The approach can be used with any spelling words but should be alternated with other activities such as spelling games and extensive writing activities.

As preparation for the spelling dictation program, time should be given to having students write a variety of sentence structures and providing positive examples of sentence variety and patterns. Students then write a specific number of sentences containing a specific number of spelling words. The number of both will vary with the ability of the student to handle longer assignments, but the average number of sentences I assigned was seven and the average number of spelling words was ten. Actually, since every word counted on the test, many small words were also reinforced or learned. Spelling of every word in every sentence is checked by the teacher with the student present when possible. Ideally, the student has had the help of a parent or other good speller when making the final copy of the sentences. Corrections can be made to the student on tape by the teacher without the student present to correct the errors. The sentences are studied for a pretest, with every word (even "and") counting.

Student partners give each other the pretest as well as a test containing only those sentences which contained errors on the pretest. The student keeps a record of the errors and adds them to a personal spelling list. The greatest benefit from this spelling sentence program was that students not only improved in spelling of words used daily, but also improved in their written expression. The written expression aspect seemed most aided by my reinforcing the "best written" sentences on each student's paper and explaining the reason for my choice.

The test of a spelling program's effectiveness is students' abilities to proofread their writing and use spelling tools to correct their spelling errors. This can be done without stifling creative thought when writing. Students should be encouraged to get their ideas on paper without the pressure of accurate mechanics. As students write, they should be told to make educated guesses about spelling they don't know. They can write letters and dashes, circle and/or question mark those words, but must maintain their flow. If a student compulsively needs to spell a word while writing, then the word should be written for him or her to be copied by the student, not spelled orally. What must come after the writing is finished is the opportunity and directive to proofread the writing.

A number of people may do the proofreading following the writer. Various peers with specialties in spelling or other mechanics can proofread with the writer present, the teacher serving as final proofreader. The writer can correct those words frequently misspelled due to carelessness and use reference tools to correct words not known. Peers and the teacher may find other errors not observed by the writer and help him or her correct those. To build the spelling self-confidence of some students with very poor spelling power, a certain number of words--rather than every error--could be corrected and studied. Error patterns should be noted during the proofreading, and procedures described above for personalized spelling could be followed.

If the entire paper is to be rewritten, there should be a reason for rewriting the paper, with spelling errors as well as other mechanics corrected. The purpose may range from putting the writing on view for others to its publication in a class book of writing. Creating books for younger children has been found to provide much incentive for poor spellers to proofread their work thoroughly and focus on spelling words which might otherwise appear "childish" to them.

Some general guidelines which should be considered when using any spelling program follow:

- 1) Students can study more spelling in small "doses" than in large. It has been found that students do better on weekly review tests when they receive a portion of the words daily and are tested daily than when they have a great many words to learn for one test.

2) Tests should be immediately corrected by the students taking the test. In this way, the students can quickly see where in the word they made the error and discover the words needing study.

3) If your program mandates particular spelling words, or if you are concerned that personalized lists are too limited, use a combination of words from published lists and students' writing.

4) Keep a file of frequently misspelled words on alphabetized cards or a chart of common spelling errors to which students can refer.

5) Provide many spelling games and activities which require students to manipulate letters and analyze the spelling structures of words.

6) Create many opportunities for students to write so that their spelling is used in meaningful contexts which reinforce the idea of a spelling conscience.

7) Provide spelling references which students can use to correct their own errors or check their spelling. Knowing where to find a correct spelling is as valuable a tool as any spelling technique, particularly since there are so many exceptions to the "rules" of spelling. A number of spelling references are available today, with the following only a partial list:

Spellex Word Finder by Curriculum Associates of Newton, Massachusetts, provides a quick way to check the spelling of over three thousand entry words and forms of those words.

The Word Book from Houghton Mifflin Publishers provides 40,00 words with syllabication.

Other suggested references are Word Finder by Anderson, Straub and Gibson; Write it Right by Cardenas; and the Mis-speller's Dictionary by Norback and Norback.

"Do-It-Yourself-Spelling" activity cards are a set of cards from the Interaction series edited by James Moffett for Houghton Mifflin. The cards provide specific guidelines for students to help improve their spelling. These suggestions are also contained in Student-Centered Language Arts and Reading: K-13 (1976) by Moffett and Wagner.

Dictionaries are questioned by many as a spelling reference tool since it is often frustrating to search for a word through the large volume of meanings and other information provided. If a dictionary must be used, for lack of other references, then some time should be given to activities which train students to use the dictionary for spelling. Students should know alphabetical order and use of guide words and they should explore spellings of sounds in words.

There are many recommendations available today for improving the mechanics of students' writing, including spelling. As the educational pendulum swings again, let us hope that it reaches a balance point where "spelling counts" in all writing, but where expression of ideas counts first.

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A Linguistics Base for Written Composition

Ann O. Gebhard

Any rationale for teaching written composition must take into account contributions of the modern science of language. Hailed by its adherents as "a revolution as sweeping in its consequences as the Darwinian revolution," twentieth century structural linguistics underscored the role of speech as the primary language act. A publication of the Linguistic Society of America by Bloch and Trager defines language as "a system of arbitrary vocal (*italics added*) symbols by means of which a social group operates." This emphasis on sound resulted in a new awareness of the importance of dialect, a regional and social variety of a language distinguished from other varieties by features of pronunciation, vocabulary, and syntax. Everyone, affirmed the linguists, speaks a dialect; indeed, each individual's speech is so peculiarly a manifestation of his singular history that everyone speaks an *ideolect*.

Like other natural scientists preparing taxonomies, linguists were reluctant to make normative statements about the phenomena under consideration. To the dynamics of social and economic change could be ascribed the emergence of the prestige dialect. The establishment of standards, so much in evidence in prescriptive traditional grammar, was not considered a legitimate function of descriptive structural grammar, which directed itself to objective inquiry.

For example, how does speech communicate meaning? The arrangement of phonemes into morphemes and morphemes into more complex lexical and syntactical patterns is, of course, basic. But the new scientists of language could characterize other vehicles of meaning--the suprasegmental phonemes of pitch, juncture, and stress; and kinesics, body language, the importance of the questioning turn of the listener's head or the affirmative raising of the speaker's hand in conveying information; and paralanguage, the shout, the murmur, the deprecating laugh, also a meaningful part of communication.

From earliest times the study of language had been the study of its written form. In asserting the obvious, that speech is the primary language act preceding and underlying its visual representation, the structuralists challenged the pre-eminence of the written language as arbiter of correctness. They consider

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edited written English to be another and distinct dialect with its own conventions--obviously different from those of spoken dialects--to secure meaning. According to W. Nelson Francis:

The difference between the way educated people talk and the way they write is a dialectual difference. The spread between these two dialects may be very narrow, as in present-day America, or very wide, as in Norway, where people often speak local Norwegian dialects but write in the Dano-Norwegian Riksmål.

It has become axiomatic that the child enters school having successfully internalized the rules of his spoken dialect. It is in school that he must master the conventions of the written form. Graphemes, slowly and often laboriously executed, must replace the phonemes which can be spontaneously produced. The conventions of punctuation and capitalization must come to function in place of the suprasegmentals. Without the help of gesture and voice contour, utterances must be syntactically complete and relatively precise to convey meaning. Roy C. O'Donnell has found definite evidence of syntactical distinctions between the speech and writing of school children.

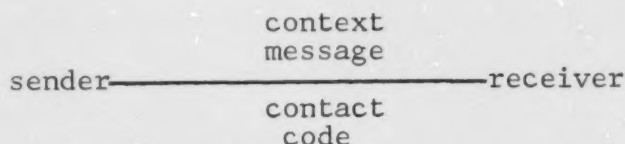
Distinct and dramatic differences were found in the syntax of speech and writing in all three grades from which writing samples were collected. On almost all counts, it was clear that where notable differences appeared in Grade 3 (and there were many), they indicated weaker control in writing.

...Unexpectedly uniform evidence, however, showed that advances in the control of syntax in Grades 5 and 7 were accelerated in writing far beyond those reflected in speech.

The great task of the child's school life is to learn to decode and encode this special dialect; Robert Allen has likened it to learning "a second language."

To the teacher of composition this view of his task poses engaging questions. What is the relationship of the student's mastery of the spoken form to his mastery of the written dialect? Obviously, the child whose spoken dialect approximates standard form has a distinct advantage; differences which might pass unnoticed in transient oral usage can appear as glaring mistakes in the more static mode. Most secondary students manage to translate the oral into the written form fairly consistently. "I am going to the store," is written in standard form whether or not "gonna" is the choice in oral language. To what extent in poor writing are writing errors manifestations of spoken dialect interference? Are there conventions, such as strictures against the use of the first person or contractions, that the teacher expects to be observed in the written dialect?

More serious questions concern the relationship of written to spoken language as a vehicle of conceptualization. Jacobson's well-known model of the speech act contains six elements:



Commenting upon this formulation, Robert Scholes has remarked:

...in the oral act, all the Jacobsonian elements of communication may be at hand: context, sender and receiver may be physically present when the message is delivered through an oral contact in a code such as English. But in the written act the message itself is frequently all we have.

When the medium of communication becomes writing, does the necessity for a code rich enough to transcend the absence of speaker contact and context put unmanageable burdens on all but the most verbally gifted students? de Saussure's distinction between syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations among language signs makes clear the complexity of the communication task even at the fairly simple sentence level. Syntagmatically Paine's beginning, "These are the times that try men's souls," is a short complex sentence of the SVC type in which the complement is modified by a relative clause of the SVO pattern. While the language would allow some reordering, such as "Times that try the souls of men," it would not allow variations of a random nature. "Times souls these men that are try," is not an English sentence.

However, the paradigmatic possibilities are more various. Times, for example, belongs to a noun paradigm containing a number of synonymous possibilities, such as days, epoch, period, etc. Similarly, try could be paradigmatically rendered by other verbs such as test or prove. Obviously, two statements that are syntagmatically identical can be paradigmatically very dissimilar. Both the writer and speaker are involved with two considerations: choice of words and their arrangement.

But, unlike the speaker, the writer has no external guides in making these choices. No listener's puzzled frown tells him to correct an inappropriate word choice. He cannot rephrase and repeat in mid-utterance or provide tonal emphasis to give clarity to a tangled sentence. Only the sensitivity of his own inner ear to the nuances of the written dialect will direct his choices. Essentially, the superior writer has developed an ear for disharmonies in word choice and arrangement, that facility traditionally labeled diction. When the three-year-old asks, "Has the garbage burned down?" or the foreign student declares, "When you would have boys at the party, Sue would not act so crazy," we assume tolerantly and correctly, that neither has as yet totally

internalized English idiom. Much of the labor of learning to write acceptable prose--as well as learning a foreign language--lies in attaining the kind of mastery Swift was referring to in his famous definition of style: "the proper words in their proper places."

Thus, even at the basic sentence level, written language requires much greater lexical and syntactical precision than its spoken counterpart. The Russian psycholinguist L. S. Vygotsky has suggested that the oral and written forms may reflect two distinct thought processes.

Our investigation has shown that the development of writing does not repeat the developmental history of speaking. Written speech is a separate linguistic function, differing from oral speech in both structure and mode of functioning. Even its minimal development requires a high level of abstraction.

An understanding of the degree of abstraction of larger units of written discourse also seems important. Convention distributes prose writing among four rhetorical modes: narration, telling a story about what happened; description, transforming mental images into words; exposition, explaining by setting forth facts or ideas; and argumentation, offering reasons for or against something. James Moffett in Teaching the Universe of Discourse adds another dimension to these categories: drama, the recording of what is happening. Moffett theorizes that drama is the least abstract of possible modes of discourse and that narrative and exposition are successively more abstract in their degree or removal from here and now reality. His curriculum plan urges teachers to enhance students' potential language growth by maximizing opportunities for verbal interaction through creative dramatic and discussion activities.

Moffett and other theorists have stressed the need for teachers to model language programs on the process of children's early language acquisition. The work of Roger Brown and Ursula Bellugi indicates that the toddler's impressive ability to learn language is heavily dependent upon the presence of rich verbal interaction in his home environment.

Curriculum makers should understand that a sound writing program is inextricably bound to activities that enrich oral language use. And that, as in any other school disciplines, the most productive learning structure is one that moves from the concrete to the abstract. Composition programs should be sequenced so as to enhance students' opportunities to succeed. Throughout the grades children need to write for and receive feedback from audiences other than teacher/raters. Written language ability, like its antecedent and corollary, oral language ability, will be encouraged through frequent practice in situations that are personally meaningful to the child, executed in supportive contexts.

It is a linguistic truism that the average six-year-old entering school has internalized all but a few elements of spoken English. Within a few years he must learn to read and write--to decode and encode its graphemic representation. Given the circularity of language ability, this initial verbal facility provides the foundation for an ascending spiral of reading and writing ability.

If this is the case, it seems obvious that composition programs at the elementary through college level must aim for two goals: fluency and control. Many teachers of composition while welcoming modern emphasis on enrichment activities such as role-playing, small group discussion, reading aloud to students, and journal writing have tended to consider such procedures basically frills. The "real" instruction seems to go on when children are hard at work framing topic sentences, developing expository paragraphs, and correcting unsatisfactory usage.

Janet Emig demonstrated that even superior secondary students are much more at ease writing personal narrative and reflection than writing exposition. Fluency is not only a corollary of writing superiority but a basic ingredient of it. The first goal of a school composition program should be to encourage confidence in using the written medium. This can only be done through extensive oral activities, at least partially involving oral reading by the teacher, and through writing that emphasizes personal narrative and de-emphasizes extensive correction of usage.

Control, which is certainly necessary to produce the able writer, must follow upon fluency. Sensitivity to the written dialect is basic; otherwise much composition teaching seems futile.

Informed by the insights of modern linguistics, a sound composition program will resist simplistic "back to basics" solutions stressing formal grammar and extensive usage drill to the detriment of more naturalistic activities. Writing as a skill needs to be consistently viewed in the context of other language processes--reading, listening, thinking, speaking. The interdependence of the language arts is an educational truism reaffirmed by the work of contemporary linguists.

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COUNCILGRAMS recently (Vol. 39, September 1977) passed on a report by Bart Barnes from the Washington Post as well as other sources regarding one school system's response to the "writing crisis." The superintendent of the Fairfax County, Virginia, Schools last spring apparently "ordered the county's 60,000 high school students ...to produce at least one piece of writing that has flawless grammar, punctuation, and spelling by the end of the school year." High school students are required to rewrite their papers until they are free from mechanical errors. Superintendent S. J. Davis intends to monitor student performance by having random samples of students' writing periodically sent to his office. Samples could include business letters, research papers, or original compositions. Since, according to Mr. Davis, many students get their papers back with errors noted by teachers, throw the papers away, and commit the same errors on their next papers, the re-writing edict is an attempt to make students learn from their mistakes so they will not repeat them.

Creating Sentence Combining Activities

Harold E. Nugent and Darryl LeDuc

As English teachers we all have noticed the substantial difference between our student's oral and written performances, especially between informal speaking patterns and the more formal written practices. In most cases we conclude that the student's speech probably more closely matches his/her abstract linguistic knowledge. How many times have we asked a student during a rewriting conference, "What is meant by this sentence?" only to have the student explain quite effectively his or her intention? Both syntax and logic are more complex and precise in the spoken mode. "Why don't you write that way?" we query.

One of our tasks as English teachers from the elementary to college level is to narrow the gap between the student's competence and performance. What are some methods to make this implicit knowledge explicit enough not only to have the student perform more effectively but to be able to talk about the process before and afterwards? One approach that holds much promise as an activator of student competence is Sentence Combining.

At present there are two types of sentence combining exercises available in text form for use by teachers and students. The first type as found in the text by Frank O'Hare may be labeled "signaled" exercises, and the second type, "open" exercises as represented in William Strong's text.

In the signaled exercises, instructions are given at the end of the sentence to guide the students in the combining process.

SOMETHING should make you avoid him.
He is an absolute nut. [THE FACT THAT]
The fact that he is an absolute nut
should make you avoid him.

Joe forced the quarterback to eat the
ball. Joe burst through the line. [ING]
Bursting through the line, Joe forced
the quarterback to eat the ball.¹

As there are no signals to instruct the student, there are no predetermined results in the second type, "open" exercises.

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Rock Concert

1. The singer was young.
2. The singer was swarthy.
3. He stepped into the spotlight.
4. The spotlight was red.
5. His shirt was unbuttoned.
6. The unbuttoning bared his chest.
7. Sounds ballooned around him.
8. The sounds were of guitars.
9. The sounds were of drums.
10. The sounds were of girls.
11. The girls were screaming.

Using their intuitive competency, students can experiment with a variety of combinations and produce a range of solutions. Strong gives two possible outcomes:

The singer, who was young and swarthy, stepped into the red spotlight. His unbuttoned shirt bared his chest. Sounds of guitars, drums, and screaming girls ballooned around him.

As the sounds of guitars, drums, and screaming girls ballooned around him, the young, swarthy singer stepped into the red spotlight, his shirt unbuttoned, baring his chest.²

The advantages of these two types of exercises, signaled and open, are that while they activate student competency, the structured nature of signaled exercises provides built-in success, for students, with a resulting increase of confidence. The open exercises can bring to the level of awareness the many stylistic options that are available in the language.³ Both types of exercises can serve as an introduction to the concept of sentence combining as well as a possible diagnostic and remedial instrument. In all cases the focus is on putting sentences together rather than in taking them apart.

However, to view sentence combining as an end in itself is to limit its ultimate effectiveness. As soon as a student is able to understand the rudiments of the sentence combining process, which can be done in two or three lessons, the focus should be on the student's own writing. This approach, the "organic" approach, utilizes sentence combining as an on-going process in prewriting, writing, and rewriting activities. The organic approach can be divided, for the purpose of this paper, into a sequence of five steps: Generating, Processing, Connecting, Positioning, and Operating. The concomitant evaluation process will conclude this article.

Two points should be mentioned initially. One is that as all steps are quite intuitive for native speakers of English, teacher

and students can either start formally at the first step, Generating, or tap native competence more completely by focusing on Connecting and Positioning without explicating the Generating or Processing steps immediately. Either way much information with little evaluation should be provided in order that students gain confidence yet at the same time have the opportunity to experiment with their language.

The second point is that we should remind ourselves as well as the students that this is a model of the process, necessitating fragmentation of the process as well as slow motion to better provide insights into the complexity of the composing process. As we listen to the students decode and encode sentences, we realize how much closer to solid state circuitry the process actually is. We will, in fact, borrow some terms from computer language to remind us how close to instantaneous action the human mind works when combining sentences. With these qualifications made, we are ready to have the students participate in the process.

GENERATING

In the first step, Generating, students formulate simple sentences or basic sentence patterns concerning a topic of interest. The basic sentence patterns found in Norman Stageberg's Introduction to English Grammar are representative and quite teachable.⁴ It is important from the start to keep the pre-writing context as rhetorical as possible. In James Moffett's words, "somebody-talking-to-somebody-else-about-something," is the rhetorical context we as teachers should always aim at.⁵ Pictures, posters, films can be used to initiate interest. Brainstorming or free association can often produce key words that can later be formed into basic sentence patterns. Students can often benefit by evaluating form and meaning relationships at this stage. For example, is N1 V N2 (acting upon) more appropriate than N1 be N1 (identifying) for a particular picture or happening?

In prewriting exercises, a class after looking at a Delta airline poster came up with the following sentences, "You/I are/am ready. Delta is ready."

PROCESSING

Again in keeping with our belief that initial activities should have high structure with low evaluation, the Generating step is followed by the second step, Processing, which involves the concept of a Matrix Sentence, an Input Sentence, and an Output Sentence. The matrix is the sentence pattern chosen for its primary or major importance. The input sentence or sentences are chosen as secondary ideas while the output is the combination of the input and matrix.

We can ask the student which of the two Delta sentences is to be chosen for the matrix. Which one for the input? What

determines the choice? If you are a Delta airline advertising executive, how would you perceive the choice? If you are a person who has waited four hours on the plane and it is still on the runway? Your respective choices might look like this:

1. Matrix: Delta is ready.
Input: You are ready.
or
2. Matrix: I am ready.
Input: Delta is ready.

In the first example of Processing, the choice of the matrix signals that the speaker considers Delta more important than you. In the second example, the opposite: I is the primary consideration and Delta is in minor or secondary relationship.

CONNECTING

The next step in our slow motion version of sentence combining is Connecting. Here another decision must be made concerning the logical relationship to be expressed between the two sentences. What are some of the possible relationships that might exist between input and matrix sentences? What are some of the possible logical relationships that might be established between the matrix and the input in our two Delta examples? In the first where the matrix is Delta is ready, and the input is You are ready., one appropriate choice might be the temporal relationship. In the second example where the matrix is I am ready, and the input is Delta is ready., the logical relationship might well be one of cause-effect.

In making the choice of logical relationships between sentences, we usually have a certain connector in mind. Here is a partial list of relationships and corresponding connectors that are possible choices:

Coordinating: and, either-or, neither-nor, first-second-third...
Comparing-Contrasting: as, although, but, even though...
Cause-Effect: because, since, so that, consequently, if, unless...
Emphasizing-Deemphasizing: indeed, in fact, even, besides...
Temporal: after, before, when, while, meantime, just as...
Generalizing: that is, especially, in other words, in summary...
Elaborating: who, which, that, whom, where, when....⁶

The mature writer is careful, precise, and practiced in the choice of connectors. If we choose temporal and cause-effect respectively, our connectors could very well be when and if or before and since. With these in mind we can proceed with the fourth step in combining sentences, namely, Positioning.

POSITIONING

There are four positions that the input sentence can take. You may put the input sentence to the right of the matrix, or in

place of an element in the matrix. These positionings are called right branching, left branching, mid branching, and embedding respectively.

With our decisions made concerning Processing and Connecting, we can now choose one of the four positions for our input sentence. For example:

Matrix: Delta is ready.
Input: You are ready.

Logic: temporal Connector: when Positioning: right branching

1. Output: Delta is ready when you are ready.

or if we choose left branching:

2. Output: When you are ready, Delta is ready.

or mid branching:

3. Output: Delta, when you are ready, is ready.

Embedding is a little more complex and requires a different construction of the matrix:

Matrix: SOMETHING is impressive.
Input: Delta is ready.

The result of the embedding positioning would be

4. Output: The fact that Delta is ready is impressive.

In our second set of Delta sentences where the matrix is I am ready. and the input is Delta is ready., the same positionings are possible: RB: I am ready if Delta is ready. LB: If Delta is ready, I am ready, and so forth.

Students are quick to notice that the left branching (LB) always requires certain usage signals. Would these indicate that right branching is perhaps more "normal" and the capitalization and punctuation signal otherwise? Marilyn Sternglass suggests certain degrees of difficulty in reading the various positions in a recent article in CCC.⁷ Class discussion on this point as well as on the reasons for using the various positions might be profitable at this stage. Certainly the role of audience involvement, emphasis on the input sentence, and variety in general would be points to consider. Positioning activities also provide an opportune time to put transcribing skills into perspective as will be discussed later.

OPERATING

The fifth and final step in sentence combining is Operating. In actual practice, students will intuitively start to modify

the input as well as the matrix sentence as early as the Processing or Connecting steps. The teacher can probably best sense the most appropriate time to make explicit some of the Operating rules. Teacher and students then could inductively arrive at some generalizations concerning the modification or transformation of the combined sentences. Four categories of operations can be formulated: adding, deleting, substituting, and rearranging. Examples of each will be given when we examine the application of sentence combining to rewriting. First, a final look at our Delta sentences can reveal the complete process of sentence combining from Generating to Operating.

Matrix: Delta is ready.

Input: You are ready.

Logic: temporal Connector: when Positioning: RB

Operations: deleting

Output: Delta is ready when you are.

With this last example we have completed the examination of the five steps of sentence combining and their concurrent decisions:

1. Generating Sentence Patterns - deciding on form and meaning
2. Processing Sentence Patterns - deciding on matrix and input
3. Connecting Sentence Patterns - deciding on precise connectors
4. Positioning Input Sentences - deciding on appropriate position
5. Operating on Combined Sentences - deciding on effective operations.

With the students made more aware of the process of sentence combining and its related terms, more and more time can be spent on the student's language in the larger context of composing beyond the sentence level. Sentence combining can play an integral part in any formal prewriting heuristics such as those outlined by Joseph Comprone in his new text, From Experience to Expression.⁸ Whether we are utilizing Comprone's five stages of conflict, articulation, incubation, discovery, and product or the more informal approaches of gathering information, organizing the information, and presenting the information, sentence combining can play an important role.

As a means of gathering information students can generate ideas as mentioned previously either in the form of basic sentence patterns or in the form of words as generated from brainstorming or free association. These words can be formulated into sentence patterns at the appropriate time. Perhaps at this time the student can sense what Comprone calls a "conflict." These sentences can also be used as warm ups for free writing or as actual journal entries. Prewriting sentence combining

activities such as these also work well in small groups of 2-4 students where the use of individual clear transparencies and grease pencils can give each student the opportunity to make the decisions concerning the Processing and Combining steps.

The students can share these products in small groups and then present a "committee" product on the overhead projector, or the teacher can collect individual creations and discuss the grammaticality, acceptability, and audience effectiveness of the sentence combining. Brief audio-lingual drills are quick and effective ways of activating the student's competence, at the same time refining one of the five steps. The teacher can give the cues:

The cheerleaders were courageous.
The cheerleaders remained on the bus.

and the students can respond orally with a sentence similar to

The cheerleaders who remained on the bus were courageous.

In organizing the information stage, the teacher can have students individually or in groups focus on the selection of matrix and input, on the choice of precise connectors, and on effective positioning and operations as outlined in the five steps of sentence combining.

In terms of refining the presentation of the information, the student, once he has a grasp of the sentence combining process, can respond effectively to the teacher's suggestions either at the drafting or recasting stages. For example, here is a student paragraph that is composed almost completely of simple sentences with each acting as a matrix/major idea.

My Idiolect

I grew up in the West. We had hotcakes or pan-cakes for breakfast. We never had "johnnycakes." They were prepared in a frying pan or a skillet. They were never prepared in a "spider." (Horrors!) We occasionally went sledding in the winter. We never went "tobogganing." We never made "belly floppers." My "r's" are always very pronounced. I make no distinction between "marry," "merry," and "Mary." I say "yeah," "nope," and "you all." I greet my friends with a "Howdy." I usually refrain from adding "partner." I am from the West. I speak somewhat differently from a native New Englander.

Here the teacher can direct recasting activities by bracketing certain sentences as a request to the student to work out Processing, Connecting, and Positioning activities. The teacher can determine how much structuring of the exercises is appropriate in terms of the student's need for confidence, and stage of development. For some students just the brackets would suffice

while others might be asked to set up the matrix, input, output format. Still other students might function better with the actual connectors provided as in the signaled exercises mentioned earlier.

Matrix: [We had hotcakes or pancakes for breakfast.

Input: I grew up in the West.]

Outputs:

LB: When I grew up in the West, we had hotcakes or pancakes for breakfast.

RB: We had hotcakes or pancakes for breakfast when I grew up in the West.

MB: We had, when I grew up in the West, hotcakes or pancakes for breakfast.

Matrix: [I greet my friends with a "Howdy!"

Input: I usually refrain from adding "partner."]

Output: I greet my friends with a "Howdy!.." but I usually refrain from adding "partner."

A number of operations are also possible in the student's paragraph. Students' speech gives us substantial evidence of their competence to not only combine sentences but to apply the operations in natural yet quite sophisticated and complex ways. With some directed sentence combining activities this competence can start to manifest itself in the written performances of students. Again the brackets indicate to the student that some sentence combining is possible.

A. Addition

Matrix: [We went sledding in the winter.

Input: We never went "tobogganing."]

Output: We went sledding in the winter, but we never went "tobogganing."

B. Deletion

Matrix: [The pancakes were prepared in a frying pan.

Input: The pancakes were never prepared in a "spider."]

Output: The pancakes were prepared in a frying pan, never in a "spider."

C. Substitution

Matrix: [We had pancakes for breakfast.

Input: The pancakes were prepared in a skillet]

Output: We had pancakes for breakfast, and they were prepared in a skillet.

D. Rearranging

Matrix: [I speak differently from a native New Englander.

Input: I am from the West.]

Output:

LB: Because I am from the West, I speak differently from...

RB: I speak differently from a native New Englander since I am...

MB: I, being from the West, speak differently from a native...

As a result of such organic sentence combining activities, a finished product might look like this:

Flavor of the Wild West

Where I grew up, we had hotcakes or pancakes for breakfast but never "johnnycakes." They were prepared in a frying pan or a skillet but never in a "spider." (Horrors!) We occasionally went sledding in the winter, but we never went "tobogganing" or made "belly floppers." My "r's" are always very pronounced, and I make no distinctions between "marry," "merry," and "Mary." I say "yeah," "nope," and "you all." I greet my friends with a "Howdy!," but I usually refrain from adding "partner." In short, being from the West, I speak somewhat differently from a native New Englander.

EVALUATING

Sentence combining performances such as the above can provide a productive context in which to teach transcribing fundamentals such as capitalization, punctuation, modification, and agreement while at the same time keeping the process of ordering experience primary. As mentioned previously, students are quick to notice and grasp the idea that left branching always requires a capital letter and a comma whether the input is adverbial or participial. In the latter case the old bug-a-boo of the dangling modifier can often be explained quite effectively with a minimum of nomenclature and a maximum of understanding. For example in the student sentence: Looking up the river, the steamboat came down., the student can denature the sentence into

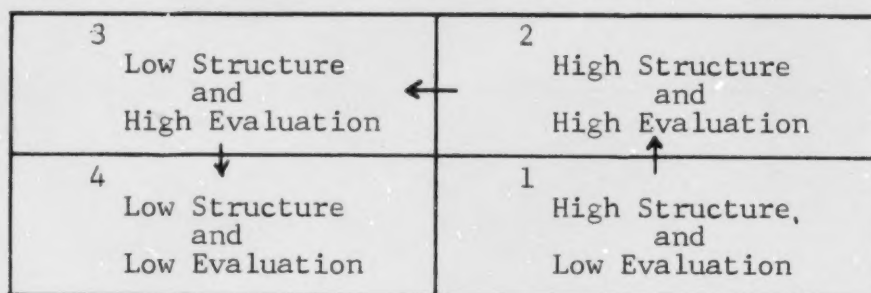
Matrix: The steamboat came down.
Input: I looked up the river.

Teacher and student can generalize that not only the need for a capital and a comma is here but that when left branching occurs (or right or mid branching for that matter) you can't delete the subject of the input sentence unless it is the same as the subject of the matrix. More positively stated, you can delete the subject of the input sentence if it is the same as the subject (shares the subject) of the matrix sentence. Output sentences must carry enough information for the teacher to recover the subject if it is deleted. The result of keeping this rule in mind is the following:

Output: As I looked up the river, the steamboat came down.

As the primary focus is always on the content, context, and logical relations, the discussion of such transcribing skills, as William Strong states is "...non-threatening and takes place at no risk to the student's self-esteem."⁹

The evaluating process from beginning to end is important in terms of the student successfully internalizing the process. The organic approach is based on the belief that in order to activate the student's competency, the initial activities should be highly structured but accomplished by a relatively low amount of evaluative judgment. Once the student experiments with the concept, receives feedback from various sources including his own sensitivities, and gains confidence, evaluation can increase. At this point the structured formats can decrease while the evaluation can remain constant. The ultimate goal, of course, is that both external structure and evaluation are no longer necessary since the writer provides sufficient amount of each himself. A schema adapted from a management model by Henry Blanchard might prove helpful to illustrate the four step approach:



10

In conclusion, organic sentence combining activities can involve the student in a number of perceptive and cognitive decisions. Once the writer conceives the idea and generates it into basic sentence patterns, his cognitive abilities have a chance to come into the decisions making process. With previous practice with structured activities and with a minimum of terminology, student's implicit habits can be rendered explicit with an increase in effective communication. The objective is to raise the level of awareness in the student, and at the same time help him to explore his linguistic power to do with written sentences what he often is already doing with spoken sentences.

The need for the student to write something important and interesting to a definite audience is at the heart of the composing process. Signaled and open sentence combining exercises if not soon taken from the student's own language and made organic tend to become non-rhetorical with the result that students may overvalue the combining process. The ability to know when not to combine is as important a product of sentence combining activity as the ability to combine. The distinction here, as James Moffett points out, is one of the student being able to combine rather than being obliged to combine.¹¹

Sentence combining is not a composition program in itself, but it can and should be an integral part of a total sequential composition program in the school, beginning in the elementary grades. The concept is a powerful one as it is based on the natural competency of the speaker's own inventiveness as well as on the speaker's own natural growth in conceptualizing.

FOOTNOTES

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11. James Moffett, op. cit., p. 171.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES

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What's Expected of High School Graduates-- A View From A College English Department

Ross Baiera

Now, while elementary and secondary schools are talking in earnest about "returning to the fundamentals" and colleges are reinstating freshman composition as a "required course," it is essential that educators at every level of the educational process, especially teachers of English, share their concerns for students' writing skills and seek possible remedies for the deficiencies.

As the chairperson of the English Department of Central Connecticut State College, I would like to share the points of view of a cross-section of college English instructors regarding students' writing skills, and more particularly what is expected of incoming freshmen. Much of what I have to say is not my personal opinion but a synthesis of responses from Central's thirty-five full-time English faculty. Though at times what will be stated sounds like "pointing the finger of blame," that is not the intention.

Although all the members of Central's English Department are convinced that students are terribly deficient, what they suspect as the cause, what they suggest as a remedy, and what they consider essential for the incoming freshman to know vary greatly. For the sake of time and convenience, I will illustrate the variances by discussing the extremes.

At one end of the spectrum faculty members are primarily concerned about students' attitudes. They are disturbed that students come to college with damaging misinformation about the nature of language and correctness and completely confused and turned off to language study and writing. Some of the misinformation and confusion, they feel, comes from hard working and good intentioned teachers who have mistakenly equated the teaching of traditional grammar with the teaching of writing skills and who have paralyzed young writers with a whip of endless rules--"never begin a sentence with and or but"; "never end a sentence with a preposition"; "never use the same word twice in the same paragraph." In their attempt to make language fit prescribed rules and appear logical, English teachers have made the study of language mysterious, if not incomprehensible, and have necessarily made themselves appear illogical and impossible to please.

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At the other end of the spectrum college faculty members say students don't know the fundamentals. Such faculty members are convinced that the elementary and secondary schools have allowed students either to play games or to indulge in egotistical "creativity." They are also convinced that students have done little or no writing in high school. Sometimes students support this accusation not only by their deficiencies but by self-admission. Many students tell their college English instructors that they haven't written in years but that they were in high school honors English taking mini seminars in contemporary fiction.

Faculty who feel that students lack knowledge of the fundamentals believe that drilling in spelling, vocabulary, punctuation, grammatical terminology and usage, etc., etc., etc., is the only solution. Many of these college instructors in recent years have been using workbooks in their sections of freshman composition.

By presenting the two extremes I'm trying to make clear that there is no consensus as to what specific skills Central's English instructors (and I doubt that Central's English department is unique in this regard) expect of freshman students. Perhaps, in part, this disparity is related to the fact that the department does not have and has always resisted a prescribed freshman composition syllabus. Although the department does have some generalized goals and requirements for the freshman composition course as well as an active composition committee that screens students for remedial English and recommends procedure, textbooks, assignments and methodology, what instructors expect, what they do, and how they approach their subject matter vary from section to section.

Though the expectations and approaches of composition instructors appear quite different, I do think that to a large extent the disparity can be explained by individual emphasis and that there are some common attitudes and skills that most of Central's faculty consider appropriate preparation for college freshmen. If the elementary and secondary English teachers pursue the following objectives, and I am sure many do, I feel students would be better prepared for their freshman composition course, regardless of a specific instructor's emphasis, and would be more likely to succeed in that course.

Instill in students an interest in language and language study. Develop a belief in the power of language--its power to persuade and its power to control. Make students conscious of how important communication skills are to life and professional opportunities. Make writing assignments practical to life's experiences. If students believe in what their English courses have to offer, then half of the battle is won.

Make every effort to convince students that what one has to say and how one says it are inseparable. To encourage students to think this way, avoid double grades--i.e., a grade for content

and a grade for form. Don't allow students to use, "Well, you know what I meant to say," as an excuse for unclear and ineffective writing.

As much as possible be honest with students--give them a true evaluation of their writing skills. Too many students come to Central with an inflated estimation of their writing ability, yet with very low SAT verbal scores. Often it takes an instructor two-thirds of the semester to convince them otherwise; and then there is little time for constructive improvement.

Develop students' ability to think clearly--to organize and arrange material into a logical and coherent pattern and to support ideas with concrete evidence. In developing their ideas don't permit students to generalize or use cliché or canned arguments. These reinforce "peer thinking" and stifle thinking and originality.

Give students some practice writing argumentative and analytical prose--occasionally have them write about ideas rather than tell stories or emote. Within school systems, pursue the possibility of a sequential theme program.

Although many faculty members do not demand that students know traditional grammatical terminology, they do wish their students had a sense of correctness--a sense of how sentences are structured, and the relationship of words within a sentence. It would be most advantageous if students' ears were trained to hear connotative differences, accurate and effective word choice, and good sentence patterns.

By all means encourage revision. Don't allow students to think that that which they write on paper is etched in stone. Let them learn to manipulate word order and sentence construction. Grade their papers carefully, suggesting organizational improvement and paragraph and sentence revision.

Rather than merely correcting students' errors, attempt to diagnose them:

Why does the student fail to double the consonant when required?

Why does the student fail to see the difference between "it's" and "its" or "too" and "to" or "their" and "there"?

Why does the student drop common verb endings, such as "ed"?

Why does the student continually write fragments or misplace modifiers?

Make an effort to integrate writing into every aspect of the English curriculum. If the movie projector is rolled into

the classroom, then use the film to develop an interesting writing assignment. When working with literature (and I would like to add here that most of the department's faculty hope that high school students are reading both traditional literature and adolescent literature) use the readings as springboards for writing assignments.

Work a character sketch assignment into your discussion of the "Prologue" to the Canterbury Tales; have students keep a daily journal in connection with their reading of the Diary of Anne Frank. Since recent research reports that most high school students read on the identification level, it should be easy to integrate writing into the literature aspects of the curriculum. For the most part, leave aesthetic appreciation and critical analysis for college English.

Now that I've made all of these suggestions, the problem is How? For this answer we at the college level look to the elementary and secondary instructors of English. As professional educators trained in methodology, we assume that you have the expertise, ingenuity, and concern to decide how to achieve these objectives. Granted this is not any easy task; but it is a crucial one and one which will ultimately benefit not only the students but the members of our profession.

CCTE HAS R_x FOR TIRED FEET IN NYC

CCTE's hospitality room in the Hotel Americana will be open to all Connecticut English and language arts teachers on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday of the NCTE Convention (November 24-26). See notices posted in the Americana (convention headquarters) for room number and times. Come in to relax, chat, have a cup of coffee, and recuperate from conventionitis!

Composition: Using the Literary Model

Al Muller

Composition instruction has come to mean teaching students such basic writing skills as writing and punctuating grammatically "correct" sentences, as well as teaching them the more advanced skills necessary for writing unified and coherent essays with well-developed paragraphs, supporting details, and clarifying metaphors. This paper, however, is concerned primarily with an examination of a methodology for teaching the latter in classroom composition instruction.

A popular approach to teaching composition emphasizes literature study, specifically the use of literary models. This approach is based on the age-old pedagogical belief that writing skills can be developed and improved through extensive reading. This belief has been incorporated into a method: (1) the students read an essay demonstrating a particular rhetorical form, say, comparison and contrast; (2) the students examine and study the form; and (3) the students write an essay in the form.

Proponents of this use of literary models claim several definite advantages for the method. First, the students are taught expository forms. Second, the content of the models encourages the students to formulate their ideas about a topic thereby aiding in the sometimes difficult "discovery stage" of the composition process. Third, the proponents assume the students will learn what good writing is by having read the well-written models and will apply this knowledge in their own writings.

Few teachers would deny that the use of literary models can introduce students to rhetorical forms and can provide a catalyst to the discovery process. However, many would argue that reading the models does not guarantee a marked improvement in the quality of student writing. Specifically, the complaint is made that while the students might learn to write a comparison and contrast essay, there is no guarantee that paragraph development will be improved.

The legitimacy of this criticism can be documented by any number of reports, studies, and test results which establish the inability of many high school and college graduates to write clearly and thoughtfully. However, before the legitimacy of this criticism can be used to discredit the belief that reading literature is a viable means for developing composition skills, two possibilities need to be examined

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further: (1) the validity of the belief itself and (2) the resulting methodology.

The belief that reading literary models improves composition skills is not simply the unsubstantiated hope of English teachers compelled to provide pragmatic justification for the inclusion of literature study in the curriculum. Essentially, reading and writing (as well as listening and speaking) are language arts skills and, therefore, include the same basic elements. The difference is in the use of the elements. In one case, the elements are used to receive expressed thought, and in the other they are used to express thought.

The similarities between the elements have been detailed by David L. Shepherd in Comprehensive High School Reading Methods (Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1973, p. 5). The following are a few of the similarities:

<u>Reading</u>	<u>Writing</u>
Understand how to get thought from various sentence patterns	Understand how to formulate sentence patterns to express meaning
Understand the functions of sentences in paragraphs; recognizing the logic of sentence arrangement; recognizing the main idea	Know how to arrange sentences in paragraphs to express desired meaning; be able to formulate a topic sentence
Read for detail	Include detail to fit purpose
See interrelationship of main ideas and details and of details to each other	Be able to support main ideas with appropriate details

Generally, then, to be a good reader a student must recognize how language is being used, and to be a good writer the student must be able to use the language.

If, then, the interrelationships of the language arts skills support the belief that reading can improve composition skills, the problem is, or remains, to understand why the knowledge used in reading is not transferred to the writing of essays. A very obvious possibility is that the students are not good readers. This very real possibility is a temporary dead-end in terms of our immediate concerns; however, the lack of reading skills will be dealt with, even though somewhat superficially, later.

A second possible explanation for the failure to transfer skills is the role played by the purposes the reader might bring to the task of reading and exemplary models. Specifically, the reader's purpose may interfere with the conscious examination of how an essay is written. For example, if the

reading purpose is to understand content or to be entertained, it is unlikely that the reader will examine form and structure beyond the application of the skills necessary to do the intended writing.

It would seem that for the reading of literature to contribute to the development of writing skills, the reader's attention must be focused on the internal structure and its relationship to content and not just upon the mechanics of the particular rhetorical form demonstrated by the literary model. An efficient means to this end was used in the seventeenth century and earlier. A student, John Milton for one, learned to write by translating Greek and Latin classics into English and by translating English writings into the classical languages. The method was successful, at least in Milton's case, and perhaps (genius aside) the success resulted from the nature of the task. Milton's task was not to produce a literal, word-by-word, translation similar to those turgid translations produced by students attempting to pass required foreign language courses. Milton had to produce a translation containing the tone and style, as well as the message of the original. To achieve this, Milton had to read and understand the original, noting the interrelationship of all the parts to the whole. He had to note the organizational structure of the paragraphs and the internal structure of each paragraph; main idea (directly stated in topic sentences or implied) and supporting detail. He also had to note the structure of each sentence, including the use--selection--of modifiers and referents. Furthermore, he had to understand how a metaphor worked to clarify a concept and how a simile worked at the figurative level. Then, of course, he had to write his translation.

Without advocating a return to student translation of literary works into and out of English, it is apparent that we need to focus our students' attention on the form and structure of the literary model. To this suggestion the standard reply is: "We don't need to consider those matters because our students have already been given instruction in the elements of sentence and paragraph structure and development. In grammar units, the students are taught about pronouns, adverbs, adjectives, clauses, phrases, and types of sentence patterns. In introductory composition units (often in eighth or ninth grade), students are taught the function of topic sentences and organization (outlining) in written expression."

Although this argument is true, it misses the point made in the brief examination of Milton's training. The point is that the instruction needs to be simultaneous, or as near to that as possible. The students need to be taught to read for main idea while learning to write topic sentences. The students need to be taught to read for details and logical sequence while learning how to write sentences to support their topic sentences. The students need to be taught how to use sentence structure to identify an unknown word (context clues) while writing sentences which clearly express meaning. The students need to identify the referent or antecedent of a pronoun while using pronouns in their writings.

Such an approach is not difficult to execute. While discussing an essay, it is easy enough to digress from thematic discussion to analyze a particularly well-constructed paragraph, having the students identify the topic sentence and identify the supporting sentences. Furthermore, it takes little time to analyze an interesting sentence, finding the subject, embedded clauses, or asking that the referent of a pronoun be identified. The examination or discussion of the essay, then, can be followed by an assignment to write a short essay being careful to include topic sentences and supportive details similar to the paragraphs examined earlier. Thus, students will be led to consider more than just rhetorical form requirements and general content.

This approach, in addition to being an efficient means of using literary models in composition instruction, has several additional advantages. A major advantage is that it makes use of the natural interrelationship of the language arts skills of reading and writing. This, of course, works to minimize the time consuming tedium of teaching the same things over and over again. (Is it necessary to demonstrate again that we teach the same materials in the grammar/usage, literature study, and composition units?) Not only does this approach reduce the tedium, but it also allows for the immediate application of the knowledge acquired while analyzing the model. (Perhaps a brief comment needs to be made here about the desirability of the immediate application. The desirability is supported through the suggestion that only rarely is the knowledge gained during an early-in-the-year usage unit applied in the late-in-the-year composition unit.) A final advantage is that by adopting this approach, classroom time is used to improve reading and thinking skills, for example identifying main ideas and supporting details, while teaching composition.

Finally, while this essay has been concerned with expository literary models, the same approach of teaching writing can certainly be applied to other literary models including such fiction forms as the short story, drama, poetry, even the novel. In each case students are asked to read for structure, style, vocabulary, as well as content, and then to apply their acquired knowledge directly in their own writing. Full use of this approach could, in fact, promote year round writing instruction without sacrificing the language and literature elements of language arts instruction.

Composition in the Elective System

John H. Bushman

The English elective system has been under fire for many years due primarily to its apparent lack of sequence of skills and program. The critics may be justified when they suggest that the electives are nothing more than a hodgepodge of curriculum materials and teaching strategies made available to students without the benefits of order and sequence. It has been my experience that schools often make little effort to provide a meaningful pattern in which students can experience a skill-building sequence in composition, literature, and oral English when taking courses in the mini-course elective curriculum.

Since this apparent weakness in the program can be overcome through a cooperative effort by members of English departments, allowing this weakness to stand in an otherwise effective curriculum design smacks of irresponsibility. When teachers can take corrective measures to alleviate the problem, student interest, motivating curriculum, emphasis on teacher interest and expertise, and relevancy in subject matter should not be sacrificed.

The scope of this paper is twofold: 1) to offer a procedure for including a sequential program in an elective system and 2) to suggest a writing sequence that is workable in the mini-course program. Similar proposals could be made in the other language arts but I have limited this paper to the composing process.

The procedure by which a plan is devised for a sequential program is not complex. Teachers simply decide what skills should be taught within the school year and they allocate these skills accordingly to each of the four nine-week periods. For example, it is determined that if pre-writing skills are important and should be the first set of skills to be included in a writing program, then all the nine-week units taught in the first nine-week period (Sept.-Oct.) would include those skills. The same approach is given to the remaining three nine-week periods. The important consideration is that all courses taught in a given nine-week period must emphasize the same portion of the composing process.

Earlier I stated this was a simple task. On the surface it seems so. However, two important forces may militate against an easy implementation: 1) lack of total department cooperation in implementing a sequential program and 2) difficulty in arriving at a sequential composition program. It seems to me, however,

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that both of these hurdles can and must be overcome so that an effective writing program can be incorporated into the English elective system. As a help to teachers who may be in the process of devising an effective writing program, I suggest the following writing program along with proposed time periods.

FIRST NINE WEEKS

To help students overcome their negative attitude and possible fear of writing, I suggest teachers begin with pre-writing activities. During this initial stage of the composing process, students experiment with their language making it fresh, alive, and workable to express their ideas. Students work with phrases and words, primarily. There is no desire to write extended discourse at this time. They experiment with abstractions, clichés, twisted phrases, and graffiti boards. They look for ways others have made effective use of language, too: billboards, bumper stickers, comic strips.

In all English electives which are taught during the first nine weeks, teachers would emphasize this part of the composing process. Thus, no matter what course students enroll in at the beginning of the year, they are introduced to this part of the sequence.

SECOND NINE WEEKS

The second phase of the writing program parallels the development of oral communication. From the time children first begin to speak, they experiment with the sounds they hear until they stumble on to the right combination to make themselves understood. They receive a tremendous amount of positive praise and encouragement for their efforts. So it is with writing. Students learn to write in an atmosphere of encouraged experimentation which leads to successful building of meaningful language patterns through positive reinforcement.

This stage in the writing sequence is termed Experimental Writing. With the background of "language play" afforded them in the pre-writing stage, students now have the opportunity to experiment with ways of expressing ideas, with word combinations and with images. Students are encouraged to write as much as they want, as freely as they want, about what they want, without fear of failure. They are not negatively criticized or "graded down" for their attempts, but rather are rewarded along the way.

The writing at this stage is tentative. The writers are experimenting with the process and are not writing products. Teachers need to be aware of this. Students will not write much if they believe their writing will be judged as products. However, they will respond if their writing is appreciated as steps in the development of products to come.

To begin this part of the sequence, teachers give students ample time to write. Students write honestly and freely and, as

time and practice continue, the flow of thoughts to paper becomes easier. There should be no pressure on students to write in complete sentences or to use the most appropriate grammatical form. Those concerns come later. There is, however, a desire to write and to experiment.

The stimuli for writing come from many sources: students' feelings and thoughts, memories of childhood experiences, responses to pictures, music, film, and the content under discussion in the course. Students may write brief thoughts about the topic, use the stream of consciousness technique, or simply list words and phrases they associate with that topic. The important consideration is that they are not restricted by form in their writing. It would follow, then, that whatever courses the students are taking, they can write this way. It matters little whether the course is a thematic unit or a genre or survey course.

Students need an audience for their writing. Just as people find limited growth in discussions with themselves, writers need feedback from an audience of readers. In this program the audience is composed of students' peers. They share their writings with each other by reading and discussing their papers in small groups. Responses to the writing at this stage must deal only with successes in the papers. Students should look for words or phrases that sound good together, vivid images, effective descriptive words, and lively verbs. After receiving this response, students are more likely to remember what was successful and to forget about the other items that received no response as they begin another piece of writing. Therefore, through positive reinforcement, students learn what is effective in their writing and can build on it.

THIRD NINE WEEKS

Each course offered during this segment of the year should offer the students experiences in selecting, organizing, and presenting a particular idea in their writing. Excitement generated and qualities of good writing used in the Experimental stage are continued in Focused Writing. Students begin to zero in, narrow their scope as they focus their writing on a specific idea.

Many activities have helped students in the focusing process. Here are but a few of those activities:

Brainstorming is one of the most beneficial activities to help students in this focusing process. Through brainstorming, students are able to select and organize their ideas. For example, in a thematic unit entitled "Nature," students brainstorm on the subject of "rain" and can come up with many different points which they can then organize around three general areas: growth, storms, and clothing. Students use this method to help them focus their thoughts and feelings in a story or a simple narrative about "rain."

In a unit on Death, students are able to write freely and honestly about their perceptions of death. They respond to this theme in writing by giving a personal experience with death, or a fictional representation of the feelings about death.

Again, in the Death unit, after reading Robinson's Richard Cory and Bontemps' A Summer Tragedy, students respond to the following topic: "Suicide--Bravery or Cowardice?" Their ideas may come from the two works cited and/or other resources that they have read, or experiences that they have had. Included in the responses might be a discussion from these two points of view: those who commit suicide and those who are left behind.

In a unit entitled "The Joys of Childhood," students using a snapshot of their childhood, write about an incident that they remember occurring prior to age ten. If a snapshot is not available, students may simply use their memory of this childhood experience. Because the idea for writing is quite personal, students give honest interpretations of specific incidents. They are encouraged to share any lumps and bruises along with the bright spots.

A dialogue with hats stimulates much excitement and interest in writing. All that is needed are hats and a hat rack! The first writing is a narrative in which students tell the origin and description of their hats, from the hats' point of view, of course! The hat might include what it looks like, its texture, size, color, firmness, shape, place of birth, schooling, parents, siblings, hobbies, religious preference, and medical history. A second writing activity occurs after hats have been placed on the rack. Each hat starts a conversation with the hat next to it. Hats might discuss a topic of general interest to hats: their relative position on the rack, their likes and dislikes, and their concerns and frustrations.

In a Science Fiction unit students focus their writing around a character description. They create and describe "an intelligent creature from space." In their writing, students focus their attention on colorful and explosive verbs and descriptive modifiers.

In a junior high thematic unit--People Under Pressure--students working in groups of five select from various boxes ideas for one of the following categories: heroes, villains, problems, situations, and settings. The groups draw an idea from each

box and create a story using these five elements. In creating these stories, students are aware of qualities and elements of good writing such as effective beginnings, descriptive words, a variety of active verbs, clarity, and unity. These stories are shared with the whole class.

The hero theme provides many good ideas for writing. Students choose one quality that they have studied and write a story in which they emphasize the quality. The writing may be fictional or a telling of an incident from their childhood.

After reading Sir Gawain and the Green Knight in the heroes unit students use the "unreal element" to make a point in their story. The writing should be share in small groups.

During this period students continue to share and criticize their writing in small groups. This process is vitally important in order for the Revision stage of the composing process to be effective. During the latter part of the third nine-week period, after sufficient time has been spent in focused writing, students choose a piece of writing from their writing folder to revise. Students base their revisions on the comments they have received from their peers in small groups and on the suggestions that the teacher makes concerning some general writing problems. Student writers may reflect on effective word choice, repetition, sentence variety and length that their peers have suggested and/or they might look at beginnings and endings, descriptions, and unity that the teacher thinks important. It is important to note that the writers may reject some of the suggestions. If they don't, the papers may become something that is not theirs, and they may lose interest in writing. Once students have completed the revision process to their satisfaction, then and only then should their writing be evaluated as a finished product.

FOURTH NINE WEEKS

While Focused writing and Revision do continue into this time segment, teachers should introduce in the fourth quarter courses the last segment of the writing sequence--Structured Writing. It seems to me that teachers should wait until this time to introduce this more difficult kind of writing. Since this writing requires confidence, discipline, and sophistication, it should come only after students have had adequate practice in writing.

Research papers, general "themes," the five-paragraph essay are often included in schools because the educational system requires these forms of its students. Exposure to these structures is beneficial for academia but probably has little other use; however, other structured writing such as formal letters, reports, reviews, letters to the editor, speeches, news articles, and even sermons emphasize the same important logical

thinking processes but are much more relevant to the students' lives. In any case the writing should be carefully and creatively expressed. Effective writing is practiced and developed. Teachers have used (quite successfully) the following two activities to help students structure their writing in a meaningful way:

In a thematic unit entitled "Women: Roles and Goals," students write a speech for a woman announcing to their community her candidacy for President of the United States. The speech includes her qualifications, reasoning for running, goals for her administration, etc. The writing is shared in groups.

A second assignment in the women's unit has students writing a review of a film, story, poem, or the novel studied. They include an evaluation of character development, plot, theme, setting, the author's mood, and tone. They rate its effectiveness in dealing with the theme of this unit and recommend for or against it based on their opinion of the work.

My purpose in this paper has been to describe a meaningful, effective writing sequence. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, I have suggested a way for teachers to use this sequence in an English elective, mini-course curriculum so that students may benefit from a sequential program in writing.

Improving Writing Through The School-Within-A-School

Thomas R. Giblin

The following interesting items come from the pages of the English Journal:

"Why, in spite of the increasing emphasis upon English, ...do high-school graduates continue to fall so far short of the eminently reasonable requirements of the normal schools? Why are they not only slipshod in expression and indifferent as to spelling and punctuation, but also sometimes glaringly ungrammatical in speech and writing?" Sarah J. McNary asked these questions in the June 1912 issue!

"What should a pupil know in English when he enters the high school? My plea is for fundamentals, the correct habits in the fundamentals." Susan Anderson Fish made this plea in the March 1914 issue!

"...Ask a group of business men in any city and they will tell you that they are driven to distraction by stenographers who cannot add, much less compute fractions; yet these persons have been educated in our public school system. Having had some experience in teaching classes of adult business women in the essentials of English usage, I know that they clamor for commas and rules governing them, for vocabulary, spelling...They are spending money for something which it is their right to have learned as graduates of our public schools in recent years." Sound familiar? Miriam Page expressed it in the June 1937 issue!

Similar quotations can be extracted from almost every English Journal of the past few decades, yet the remaining pages of the Journal and other similar journals fill in the gaps with articles like "Fifty Nifty Ways To Teach Writing To Turned Off Kids During The Last Five Minutes Of Any Class." Interestingly, many of these articles do have nifty ideas and they do help young people to become better writers; however, 75 years after Sarah J. McNary asked her questions in the June 1912 English Journal, we still graduate an inordinately high number of young people without minimum competence or enthusiasm for writing.

One approach to the writing problem that still hasn't been given its day in court is the School-Within-A-School (SWAS), an

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organizational change that in many schools is having a profound impact on the writing habits of junior and senior high school age writers.

THE SWAS IS A MINI-SCHOOL

The SWAS is a way of organizing a mini-school within the main school at the secondary level. Most SWAS programs have the same student-teacher ratio as the main school, with a typical SWAS having 120 students and four teachers representing the basic subject areas. A SWAS will usually have one or two permanently assigned rooms for the entire day as it usually has autonomy in its schedule, organization, and curriculum. It utilizes many of the resources of the main school, such as shops, lunchrooms, gymnasiums, and specialty teachers, but only when these resources are needed or available. In many schools, the SWAS is organized initially as an "alternative school," especially for students who have not done well in the main school; while such an arrangement can work, the more successful SWAS programs are those that originate out of student, educator, and/or parent interest and are schools of choice where no one is assigned or denied admission but rather elects to participate.

For the student, a SWAS can offer a way to deal with some of the confusion created by a sometimes fragmented secondary school curriculum. Often, from a student's point of view, geometry has little to do with biology, neither seems related to social studies, and English often looks the same every year. It is sometimes difficult for young people to see how it all fits together, to make any sense out of what is happening in school as well as in their own social world. We do not intend to confuse young people, yet our present curriculum and organization do not make it possible to meet all student needs. With the major decision-making and responsibility inherent in operating a SWAS decentralized to the SWAS population, a group of 120 students and four teachers can plan and create activities that build on the special and sometimes unique talents of the students, teachers, parents, and community; provide for integration of the traditional subject areas when it is appropriate and provide for separate subject matter inquires when it is necessary; allow the students to be a part of the main school when they wish--to attend assemblies, work on the newspaper, participate in sports--as the schedule of the SWAS is flexible and ever changing, based upon the needs of its population, allowing for changes without inconveniencing large numbers of people.

For the educator, a SWAS is also a sensible option. There are many reasons why a teacher, counselor, or administrator may find a certain teaching-learning situation to be less than satisfactory, yet solutions often seem impractical or impossible when seen in light of the entire school. The SWAS allows for change today, not "later when we have the new building" or next year "when the budget is larger." It provides the opportunity

for educators to work in a setting that builds on their strengths, matching them more closely with a student who may prefer those characteristics.

For the parent, a SWAS can provide the choice that some parents now feel they must seek outside of their neighborhood school. The SWAS is a school's way of saying that differences are important. Because the SWAS is a school of choice, it is not imposed upon anyone, and this choice factor greatly enhances the opportunity for cooperation between the home and the school. In this age of accountability, such an approach at providing consumer choice is a direct response to calls for educational responsibility.

HOW CAN A SWAS IMPROVE WRITING?

Borrowing again from the past, a few more interesting items might help to illustrate how the SWAS can facilitate the improvement of writing. In a 1908 NEA meeting, Ernest C. Noyes noted what many of us have known:

"Though in any subject large classes are a distinct disadvantage, this is especially true of English. Success in English teaching depends upon personal contact...upon attention to individual needs which differ widely in the same class."

A few years later, in 1917, the Government Printing Office released the report Reorganization of English in Secondary Schools, a study that pointed out the congested conditions of secondary English classes, with a common English assignment being five or six classes with thirty to forty students per class. It concluded, "When we remember that the success of the English work depends, especially in the case of composition, very largely upon individual guidance and adequate attention to the written papers, we can see that the assignment of such overwhelming numbers to the English teacher is fatal to results."

Today, all of us still know how important personal contact and small classes can be, yet most secondary environments work against just such conditions. A solution lies in more time for teaching English and the cooperation of the other subject area teachers; that is exactly what the SWAS provides!

In a SWAS,

1) TIME IS AT YOUR DISPOSAL. Rather than selecting an activity to fit into a predetermined amount of time, you select an activity and then decide the amount of time.

2) ENGLISH HAPPENS MOST OF THE TIME. Rather than having to meet thirty students every assigned period, whether you or they are ready or not, you, your students, and/or the activity influence when, where, why, for how long, etc. And rather than complaining about the lack of concern for English in other parts

of the school day, you lead the way to help your fellow educators see when and where and why English is a vital, natural, and required component of practically every activity. In such a cooperative rather than competitive setting, the teaching of writing becomes an automatic reflex!

In most SWAS programs, writing means a journal entry after a hectic day; it is a report about black widow spiders for a science project; it is re-writing a play for production at a local elementary school; it is cooperating with 123 others on writing the 1977 Declaration of Independence; it is responding to a local newspaper editorial; it is preparing a speech about SWAS for the local Rotary Club; it is sending a telegram to the President; it is learning the importance of spelling; it is seeking out other points of view after a controversial speaker; it is learning that parents are a good resource too; it is sending ABC television a script for "Happy Days"; it is creating a musical autobiography; it is scripting a film about litter at the school; it is writing to the local lumber company asking for donations to build a tree house; it is...

Most important, writing is an activity that happens when the students have a need to write. We all know the value of motivation in writing as well as the importance of quality rather than quantity; the SWAS allows the opportunity to facilitate readiness and to foster excellence. Obviously the SWAS is not an instant cure for every adolescent dilemma, educator challenge, or parent desire, but it is one way of providing for some specialized, personalized student, educator, and parent needs, and writing does improve in such an environment.

We Can Teach Students to Write

Frederick B. Tuttle, Jr.

In spite of what Newsweek¹ and the misinterpretations of the NAEP studies indicate, we can teach students to write more effective compositions. These criticisms of student writing, however, have helped us considerably by bringing the teaching of written composition to the forefront of concerns about teaching "English." This attention has, in turn, focused efforts on the teaching of written composition as a process rather than just as an adjunct to teaching literature or "grammar." In the study described below we used the "composing process" as the basis for a ninth grade curriculum to help students improve their written compositions.

BACKGROUND

In general, the composing process may be viewed as a three-step procedure: pre-writing, writing, and re-writing.² Don Murray has labeled these steps as "prevision," "vision," and "revision," incorporating the concept of writing as an act of self-discovery.³ Some educators have expanded the three basic steps in an attempt to describe more fully the activities which usually occur within each stage. We took the steps initially outlined by Tuttle as "brainstoring, experimenting, refining, re-composing, sampling, revising, and submitting"⁴ and re-named them "stimulus, reaction to stimulus, rough draft, sharing/revision, final draft, and submission" to describe more accurately the instructional process we envisioned.

STIMULUS

For this study we defined "stimulus" as any experience to which students may react in writing. Since this broad definition could lead to a series of haphazard, unrelated lessons, we sequenced the stimuli by medium (moving from visual media to print), task required of the student (moving from translation to application), and by mode of writing involved (moving from narration to exposition to critical analysis). This progression accomplished several ends. First, it gave a recognizable pattern to the curriculum for both teachers and students. Second, it moved students through tasks in a systematic fashion, progressing from one level of difficulty to a more difficult one.

Associate Professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at State University College of New York at Brockport, Dr. Tuttle would like to thank Patricia Fullforth, Marianne Letro, Elaine Royer, and Sally Helf for their participation in this project and Dr. Morris Beers, State University College of New York at Brockport, for his help with the statistical analysis of the results.

Finally, this organization of stimuli enabled us to include all of the requirements of the curriculum, such as speech, short story, novel, mass media, and written composition, in the experimental program.

REACTION TO STIMULUS

Instead of having students write immediately after the stimulus, as was the previous practice, we devoted at least a full period to discussion of the stimulus before writing. Students also had the opportunity to hear other ideas and, perhaps, expand or modify their own. James Moffett states, "The qualifying of thought and elaborating of sentence structures develop together. Outside the classroom this development through vocal exchange occurs all the time, but in the classroom it can be furthered deliberately by creating kinds of dialogue in which questioning, collaborating, qualifying, and calling for justification, are habitual give-and-take operations."⁵ Through the reaction to stimulus and the sharing/revision phases, we incorporated this dialogue as an integral component in the composing process of the students.

ROUGH DRAFT

During this phase the students had the opportunity to experiment with words and see their ideas on paper before settling on a final draft. We tried to have students focus on ideals and words more than on mechanics at this time, as we did not want their writing to be inhibited or stultified by a concern for correctness and neatness.

SHARING/REVISION

Having written the rough draft, the students were ready to share their works with each other, discussing ideas, style, vocabulary, and mechanics. During the project we found students needed considerable direction in this task. Consequently, we suggested specific items to concentrate on during the sharing. While writing short stories, for example, each class examined the use of modifiers in another short story. This gave the students a starting point for their comments during sharing. Some students would begin with a discussion of modifiers and digress to other aspects of the compositions while others discussed only the modifiers in each other's works. As with the "reaction to stimulus" phase, this sharing experience gives the writer an opportunity to clarify and modify ideas before completing the finished product. Consequently, the writer can incorporate the ideas and modifications immediately rather than in retrospect after the paper has been evaluated.

FINAL DRAFT

Once the writer has included all of the ideas and changes, he or she prepares the final draft for submission to the audience. In academic situations the "audience" is usually the

teacher. During this stage, the writer pays close attention to style, vocabulary, and mechanics.

SUBMISSION

After the writer has progressed through all the previous stages, the work is completed and submitted for reaction. We include this as a separate stage because we accepted only those works that showed evidence of having gone through the earlier stages. Consequently, some compositions were returned for further revision. This enabled the teacher to respond to the content and style of the work more than to the mechanics as is often the case with first draft compositions. In their reactions to the students' works, the teachers gave opinions and feelings but did not assign grades. Ultimately, of course, grades were required; but these were determined on the basis of improvement (pre-post test comparisons), effort (work satisfactorily completed), and quality (the student's best work), rather than an average of grades from all the student's compositions. At first students balked at not receiving grades on each composition, but they soon accepted this and paid even more attention to the teacher's reactions to the work than they had previously.

PROCEDURE

Throughout the academic year 1976-77, the ninth grade teachers at Irondequoit High School, West Irondequoit, New York, led their students through a series of units following the steps outlined above. During the same year, another ninth grade group in a comparable school followed their "regular" curriculum.

We used several devices to determine the effectiveness of the experimental procedure both within the experimental group at Irondequoit and compared with the control group at the second school. First, we evaluated improvement in quality by comparing pre- and post-tests within each group and gain score and post-test comparisons between the two schools. After discussing specific areas in which the test compositions would be rated, high school teachers of English read and evaluated compositions from both groups. All compositions were coded, eliminating indications of the identities of individual students, schools, and test dates. The test stimulus and directions were identical for each group and each test day.

Second, we examined fluency by counting the total number of words used in each composition. In spite of questions about the validity of fluency as an indicator of quality, we felt this measure would indicate a facility with words, especially if viewed in conjunction with other measures, such as quality measured by the pre-post tests.

Third, we counted the average number of words per T-unit, following Hunt's suggestion. In his study, Hunt found that more mature writers use a greater number of words per T-unit, which he describes as:

Each unit (T-unit) is grammatically capable of being considered a sentence. In fact these units are the shortest grammatically allowable sentences into which the theme could be segmented. If it were segmented into units any shorter, some fragment would be created.⁶

Finally, we examined the success of the program subjectively by interviewing teachers involved with the project and some of the students who participated in the experiment.

RESULTS

During the analysis of the test scores for significant differences, we used a one-way, two-tailed analysis of variance for the comparison of post-test and gain scores between the two groups and a correlated, two-tailed t-test for the pre-post test comparisons within each group. The results cited below were significant at the .05 level.

When we compared growth within each group, we found that:

- the students in the experimental group wrote more effective compositions in the areas assessed by the raters (interest, conflict, character depiction, word choice, sentence structure, and overall quality) at the end of the program than at the beginning.
- the students in the experimental group wrote more fluent compositions at the end of the program than at the beginning.
- the compositions of students in the experimental group contained fewer usage errors such as spelling, capitalization, punctuation, subject-predicate agreement, and pronoun-antecedent agreement at the end of the program than at the beginning.
- there were no significant changes for the students in the control group.

When we compared the experimental and the control groups, we found that:

- the students in the experimental group improved more than those in the control group in their ability to write compositions in the areas assessed by the raters: interest, conflict, character depiction, word choice, sentence structure, and overall quality.
- the students in the experimental group improved more than those in the control group in their ability to write fluent compositions.

-the final compositions of the experimental group were better than those of the control group in all areas assessed by the raters.

-the final compositions of the experimental group were more fluent than those of the control group.

The subjective evaluations also supported the use of the experimental procedure. Nearly all of the students interviewed felt that following the composing process in their writing for school helped them write better. While not all enjoyed writing any more than they had prior to the study, most felt more comfortable with the task and confident in their abilities to succeed with it. In addition, most students felt they learned both composing skills and other "skills" such as reading and critical analysis of media more effectively through this program than they would have through a textbook.

During the interviews with the teachers of the experimental classes, all stated that while they might change some of the specific stimuli, they would definitely follow the general experimental procedure in the future. Each teacher felt instruction was more effective and that students enjoyed the classes more during the 1976-77 year than in previous ones. Regarding some of the "side benefits" of the experimental program, the teachers stated that most of their students gained confidence in their writing, and perhaps most importantly, students gained a pride in their work which students from former years had lacked. In addition, through reactions and sharing sessions, the students became more willing to share their ideas with others and to accept others' criticisms of their works.

CONCLUSIONS

From the results of the test scores we concluded that using the composing process described above as an instructional procedure helped students improve their written composition in the areas examined. We found significant improvement in usage, fluency, and quality.

The improvement in usage is important in that the students worked with mechanics in relation to their own works rather than with exercises from a textbook. Although many teachers acknowledge that students will write better through a program stressing writing rather than drill, they often express concern over the acquisition of mechanical skills without appropriate drills. By working with sentences and ideas from their own compositions, these students did improve in their abilities to use appropriate mechanical skills in their writing. Isolated textbook drills appeared unnecessary.

While improvement in fluency does not necessarily indicate improvement in quality of writing, it does suggest a facility and comfort with the language that is important, especially at the ninth grade level. Not only did the students in the experi-

mental group use significantly more words in their post-tests than in the pre-tests, they also wrote significantly better compositions. Although the increase in quality may not be directly associated with the increased fluency, at least it seems it was not diminished by it. Since the fluency of the students in the experimental group was significantly greater than that of the students in the control group, we may also conclude that this increase may be attributed to the program rather than to just maturation.

Of primary concern was the improvement in quality of writing. Again, the results favored the experimental group. Not only did these students show significant growth in all areas of quality evaluated by the raters from pre- to post-tests, they also showed a significant growth in these areas over that of the students in the control group. Consequently, we concluded that the cause of the improvement was probably due to the experimental procedure since other ninth grade students did not show a similar gain.

In addition to these conclusions, we may draw some others from the teacher and student interviews. First, using a variety of stimuli in an organized fashion helped students acquire other skills as well as those directly related to writing. For example, all felt the students could analyze literary works better after this program than in previous programs. They also felt the students were more interested in the reading as it was viewed as part of a general unit rather than as an isolated activity. Both students and teachers stated that they were more aware of mass media and could criticize it more effectively after having worked with it as part of the composing process than they were prior to the program. In short, the rest of the curriculum did not suffer because of the heavy concentration on written composition. Indeed, it seems to have been enhanced.

Finally, the teachers and students indicated other benefits not directly associated with writing, but vital to overall learning. From sharing works with one another, students seem to gain a mutual respect for each other and the class. From the revision and rewriting stages, students gained a self-confidence and pride in their works which they lacked previously. Although not all of the students actually enjoyed writing after going through the experimental program, they did feel more comfortable with it and believed they knew how to approach a writing task which might have frightened them in the past.

FOOTNOTES

1. "Why Johnny Can't Write," Newsweek, December 8, 1975, pp. 58-63.
2. Charles Cooper, "Measuring Growth in Writing," English Journal, 64 (March 1975), pp. 111-120, and Robert W. Blake, "How to Talk to a Writer, or Forward to Funda-

mentals in Teaching Writing," English Journal, 65
(November 1976), pp. 49-61.

3. Donald Murray, "Internal Revision; A Process of Discovery," paper presented at the Buffalo Conference on Research in Composing, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1975.
4. Frederick B. Tuttle, Visuals in Language Arts: Composition, Brockport: State University College of New York, 1974.
5. James Moffett, Teaching the Universe of Discourse, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968, p. 82.
6. Kellogg Hunt, Grammatical Structures Written at Three Grade Levels, Champaign: N.C.T.E., 1965, p. 21.

Art is beyond craft, but art grows out
of craft. Craft is the calculation which turns
inspiration into creation.

. . .

The writer dreams of art, but he works
at craft.

Donald M. Murray in A Writer
Teaches Writing, (Houghton
Mifflin, 1968), p. 13

ERIC/RCS Review: Teaching Composition in the Elementary Classroom

Karen Steiner

Your class of thirty-odd first graders, fourth graders, or sixth graders becomes visibly restless every time you mention a writing assignment. Perhaps half the class completes your assignment with relative ease, while the other half remains befuddled. Maybe your principal names you to yet another committee--this one organized to justify the school's language-arts curriculum to a group of parents who have been made uneasy by the current back-to-basics controversy. It is clear that, as the public becomes increasingly alarmed by the apparent decline in students' levels of achievement, the teacher's job is becoming more difficult. The problem of remaining well-informed about educational developments, particularly acute for the classroom teacher with limited time, is one which must be addressed.

The sources cited below provide a representative sample of the kinds of materials available through the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) concerning the teaching of composition in the elementary grades. Selections dealing with curriculum development and research into the composition process, as well as suggestions for classroom applications, projects, and writing assignments, are included.

THEORY AND RESEARCH

Children and Writing in the Elementary School: Theories and Techniques [ED 113 723] provides a collection of essays by leading theorists in the United States and Great Britain, concerning the teaching of written composition in grades one through eight. Commentary includes discussion of written discourse, child development, classroom management and teaching techniques, responses to children's writing, teaching some structures and conventions, and teaching rhetoric. An overview of current topics of concern, this volume contains contributions from James N. Britton, Margaret Langdon, Herbert Kohl, A. F. Watts, and others.

Composition, mechanics, and grammar are the focus of Language Arts Curriculum Guidelines; Continuum of Skills: Written Expression K-8 [ED 112 415]. Developed by the Arlington Heights, Illinois, Public School District 25, this curriculum guide defines composition skills necessary at each grade level. Classes are assigned specific activities for mastery of skills in handwriting, vocabulary, paragraph writing, and so on. Although

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the primary goal of this system is to provide a framework within which to teach students the composing and editing skills appropriate for their ages, emphasis is placed on facilitating learning at the individual child's pace. The authors warn, therefore, that grade designation of a skill means that that skill should be introduced to all students in that grade who are ready to learn it and that it should be emphasized in the work for that year.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress, the earmarking of composition ability as a new class marker, and the increased competition in an overcrowded labor market spurred the publication of ERIC/RCS and NCTE for Help for the Teacher of Written Composition (K-9): New Directions in Research [ED 120 730]. This bulletin was designed to help close the gap between educational research and the classroom teaching of written composition. Topics discussed include research, children's language and composition, motivation, the interrelationship between literature and composition, evaluation, and research perspectives derived from the behavioral sciences. Although the scope of this bulletin is kindergarten through junior high, with emphasis on the elementary level, discussions of important research above this level are included.

One study which investigates specific areas of the writing process is Mary Louise Keeney's "An Investigation of What Intermediate-Grade Children Say about the Writing of Stories" [ED 119 224]. The primary purpose of Keeney's investigation was to discover what students have to say about choice of topic, time for writing, the act of writing, and difficulties encountered in the writing process. An analysis of data collected from 109 fourth graders and 93 sixth graders revealed basically positive attitudes toward writing stories, preference for self-selected topics, and a significant relationship between students' intelligence and teacher appraisal of students' attitudes toward writing.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Iris M. Tiedt's Individualizing Writing in the Elementary Classroom [ED 113 728], one of several Theory and Research Into Practice (TRIP) booklets published by ERIC/RCS, is designed to aid the teacher who wishes to develop a student-centered, individualized writing program. A brief section devoted to theory sketches rationales for allowing students' selection of assignments and evaluation of performance, for fostering positive attitudes toward the writing experience, and for creating a physical environment conducive to creativity. The section on practice gives specific directions for setting up a learning center and minicenters which focus on specific concept mastery. Instructions are provided for preparing task cards, which permit a child to choose an independent activity; activity sheets, suitable for duplication and use in groups; learning modules, which require more preparation and student participation than

do task cards or activity sheets; and open activities, such as keeping logs, which are designed to promote self-expression.

A stockpile of ideas which teachers can adapt to their own classroom situations is contained in the February 1971 issue of the Illinois English Bulletin [ED 048 298]. Otherwise known as "A Thousand Topics for Composition: Revised," this issue presents topics submitted by 101 Illinois elementary-school teachers. For easy reference, ideas are grouped into eight subject categories: description, characterization, dramatization, narration, imaginative writing, reporting, motivational techniques, activities for the writing table, and miscellaneous.

A couple of prize suggestions from these selections: To replace trite similes, create space-age one--for example, "as bright as a laser beam." Or, instruct students to define an unknown word in any way they like and to write a story based on it. Look up the word before reading the paragraphs aloud to the class.

For a detailed selection of writing assignments devised to encourage original thinking and expression, consult Ruth Kearney Carlson's Sparkling Words: Two Hundred and Twenty-Five Practical and Creative Writing Ideas [ED 018 417]. Many of the lessons suggested have been developed from actual classroom practices; samples of children's writing are frequently included. The five chapters in this volume outline primary-grade writing activities, techniques for teaching the composition of paragraphs, ideas for stimulating story writing, poetic writing experiences, and a system for evaluating students' creative expression. The Carlson Analytical Scale for Measuring Originality of Original Stories, which appears in an appendix, was developed by the author on the basis of an analysis of 5000 stories written by children. Although judgment of the creative process (especially in children) is certainly a value-laden issue, Carlson's method may provide a basis from which to begin.

Another collection of tried and true (as well as untried and original) techniques to facilitate self-expression is provided in The Whole Word Catalog [ED 072 451], a publication of the Teachers and Writers Collaborative. Assignments, liberally illustrated with examples of student writing, are categorized according to general focus: "On Imagining to Be Something You're Not," "Outside Catalysts," "Spoofs and Parodies," "Language Games," "Poetic Forms," and so on. One grouping, "Popular, Oral and Street Lore," encourages the use of "dirty dozens" (a schoolyard game of verbal insult), graffiti, and ballads and tall tales. Another category, "Magic--Black and Otherwise," includes activities tapping such phenomena as hypnotism, invisibility, X-rays, and other aspects of children's fantasies concerning the supernatural. Suggestions are also made for using graphic materials in an original fashion. A bibliography cites relevant anthologies, resource books, magazines, and miscellaneous publications.

In "Children Can Write Poetry" [EJ 139 333], William Slaughter delineates guides for using poetry to stimulate students' imaginations and to give them a new perspective on language. Basically, Slaughter asserts that noncritical teacher feedback about children's writing is crucial. Teaching ideas include the "if/then" poem, in which logical associations prevail; the "poetman or poetwoman" poem, where children characterize the maker of verses as hero or heroine; and the "sound poem," in which a tape recorder is used to create awareness of language rhythm and variation.

Perhaps Martin Kushner's commentary in the introduction to The Whole Word Catalog best reflects the flexibility necessary in today's atmosphere of educational change:

We are ever still learning about the process of teaching. We will never develop a Method. We will still be asking the questions: How do you decide what to do in class? What do you do when an exercise isn't working?

Ultimately, of course, the individual teacher must adapt these and other resources to suit the requirements of the particular circumstance. But the more information there is to draw upon, the more timely the tools of research and the techniques with which to work, the more effective the educational solutions one might expect. For the most current resources about composition in the elementary grades, available through the ERIC system, consult the monthly issues of Resources in Education (RIE) and the Current Index to Journals in Education (CIJE) under such descriptor headings as Composition (Literary), Composition Skills (Literary), Writing, and Writing Skills.

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Also available from National Council of Teachers of English--
Stock No. 23058--\$1.25 members, \$1.50 nonmembers]

USING THE ERIC SYSTEM

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Documents in the above article which have ED numbers are indexed in Resources in Education (RIE). They can be ordered from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (make check payable to EDRS), P.O. Box 190, Arlington, Virginia 22210. PRICES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. For complete ordering information, consult the monthly issues of RIE or contact ERIC/RCS, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801.

Documents with EJ numbers are indexed in Current Index to Journals in Education (CIJE). The journals containing these articles can be found at your local library.

Responding to Student Writing

Charles R. Duke

Of all the problems in teaching writing, none is perhaps as consistently frustrating as deciding how to respond to student writing. In most instances, the basic process of responding will follow a pattern similar to the one below:

- Step 1. The teacher reads the paper and responds with understanding, puzzlement, anger, disbelief, joy--and probably a multitude of other reactions.
- Step 2. The teacher identifies particular items that are inappropriate, inaccurate, unclear, or unsuccessful, and suggests revisions.
- Step 3. The teacher summarizes the overall strengths and weaknesses of the paper and perhaps recommends a re-write or revision.
- Step 4. The teacher places some symbol on the paper to indicate its "worth" in the grading system used by the school that the student attends.

With the exception of Step 4 above, the other three steps are extremely valuable and natural parts of the writing process. Let's look at these steps again, but this time to see how they relate to fostering writing development. In Step 1, the student writer is reaching an audience; granted, the audience may be only one person, but still an audience is involved. This step does not call for a grade; instead, the teacher simply is a reader responding to a piece of writing, showing all the natural reactions that any reader might. In Step 2, the teacher is identifying those items and passages which cause the various reactions in Step 1. Although such a process may be an indirect basis for arriving at a grade, it may also be seen as performing an instructional function. The reader is attempting at this stage to actually communicate his or her experience with the writer. Step 3 requires summarizing and, again, is both instructing and evaluating, not grading. All three steps, then, are legitimate and useful actions for reflecting the response of an audience.

The breakdown in the process comes only at the fourth step where the reader must reduce an assortment of reactions, observations, responses, and assessments to a single symbol. The last step, therefore, is the one completely foreign to the entire process of writing. Even the professional writer does not have

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to deal with this dilemma; a publisher accepts a writer's manuscript on the basis of whether it will reach an audience and sell, not whether it has an A, B, C, or D quality.

We will get much further in our understanding of how to respond to student writing if we make more careful distinctions between "evaluating," or responding, and "grading." Too often the terms are used synonymously. Evaluating, or responding--deciding what to say about a piece of writing--has instructional values we should never dismiss lightly; on the other hand, grading--the assigning of a conventional and public mark--has limited relevance to the writing process and often becomes counterproductive.

To offset the stultifying role of the grader, Stephen Judy suggests that the writing teacher must be prepared to play many roles in evaluating or responding to student writing. "The roles will differ with the student, the circumstances, and the state of the original manuscript that the teacher receives. The teacher cannot simply treat themes as a 'batch,' giving every piece of writing the same basic 'evaluative' treatment."¹ Recognizing the situation and knowing what responding strategies can be used will save the writing teacher a great deal of frustration and time, not to mention making clearer the student's understanding of writing. What follows is a brief summary of some of the more useful approaches in responding to student writing.

MECHANICAL AIDS

Most school systems have access to equipment that can be useful in dealing with student writing. One of the most common devices is the overhead projector. How one uses this aid depends upon the size of the class, the organization of the course, and the nature of the assignment. One useful approach with short writing assignments--a page or less--is to make thermal transparencies and ditto masters of at least one page of each student's writing.² This process provides a transparency for the teacher to project where everyone can see it, and an individual copy of the same material for each student. In this arrangement, the teacher can read through a substantial number of pages in a class period, leading discussion as the paper is read. Eventually, students read their own papers or have other students read them. Care should be taken in the beginning sessions, though, to protect the identity of the authors, since some students are not comfortable with handling such public acknowledgement of their writing.

The advantages of this approach are that a class can become more familiar with each other's ideas and ways of interpreting an assignment, students become accustomed to having their work appear in public, and the teacher can quickly pinpoint areas for discussion and draw students' attention to those areas more easily and graphically. Because a real sense of audience develops, discussion of writing problems will be fuller than any

marginal comments could hope to be. The amount of out-of-class reading for the teacher diminishes and class time takes on a more meaningful air because "real" writing is the basis of instruction and discussion.

The cost of such a method may cause some school systems to reject it--roughly \$1.50 per student for a regular course--but modifications are possible. One, of course, is to use the procedure selectively, perhaps placing every second or third writing assignment in this arena. Another modification is to have students write their essays directly on ditto masters; copies are run off for the class and then read and discussed. Usually teachers choose to handle a few essays this way each time an assignment is due until everyone in the class has had an opportunity for this experience in evaluation. Often writing handled in this fashion does not need any further comment outside of class; papers are in the hands of the writers so they can make their own notes as discussion occurs.

The enterprising writing teacher can find that the opaque projector is another useful aid in the evaluation process.³ The opaque projector can be employed in a fashion similar to that of the overhead except that transparencies are not involved. Some teachers have found the machine especially useful in small group evaluation sessions. In such sessions, each student takes a turn in placing a paper in the projector and reading aloud to members of the group. Other members of the group are encouraged to pretend the author is not available for consultation, and the writer is asked to refrain from any interpretation of the work while reading. In this way, group members must react and respond to the writing more specifically. In time, of course, the author will wish to enter the discussion, and this encourages readers and writer to engage in helpful dialogue. During such sessions, broad and narrow questions arise about writing which the teacher then uses as a basis for additional teaching. In a small group setting, the student begins to gain some confidence in talking about writing and responding to other people's reactions to it. Although this practice may not be possible every time an assignment is due, the small group use of the opaque can be beneficial and, once again, reduces teacher time in handling papers. As groups become comfortable with the practice, reading sessions can be scheduled for free periods and groups can do much of their own responding without the benefit of a teacher's presence at every meeting.

A device used by some teachers to enhance the evaluation process is the cassette tape recorder.⁴ Many schools and a number of students possess these, so the cost factor need not be prohibitive. Instead of laboriously writing out comments to the student writer, the teacher talks on tape. To make the commentary effective, though, the teacher must be as organized and concise as possible. Certain aids such as numbering the lines of a paper for easy reference and maintaining some kind of strict time limit for each tape are helpful. The values of such a practice lie in the immediacy of the response; the student

experiences a sense of direct communication through the sound of the reader's own voice because voice inflection, pace, specific personal remarks, and the reading of passages aloud are all possible. Still another value is that the student can listen to the tape a number of times and can use it for review purposes when starting a new piece or revising an old one. Comments on tape are likely to be helpful to the student because of their length and specificity.

Tape cassettes do have some disadvantages, though.⁵ Although originally hailed as being a time-saver because the teacher would no longer have to write comments, actual experience has shown that taping comments may take just as long as writing them. Because one can say more orally in a short time than in writing, the teacher often finds that comments become too extensive and the student is overwhelmed. And then there are the problems of mechanical failure, of finding appropriate facilities and equipment to tape the comments, and, finally, of keeping a record of the comments. Because tape is easily erased and because cassettes, in particular, are not the most convenient devices on which to find specific passages, the teacher may discover that the disadvantages outweigh the advantages. Still, with practice, the approach can be effective and an occasional essay evaluated on tape can be beneficial to the student, particularly where personal contact may be a problem due to the size of classes or scheduling.

SCORECARDS

To handle the sheer volume of written work that often characterizes writing courses, some teachers have devised scales or scorecards which they can use when responding to student writing. For example, the scale devised by Paul Diedrich is one used in a number of schools.⁶

	LOW		MIDDLE		HIGH
IDEAS	2	4	6	8	10
ORGANIZATION	2	4	6	8	10
WORDING	1	2	3	4	5
FLAVOR	1	2	3	4	5 _____
USAGE	1	2	3	4	5
PUNCTUATION	1	2	3	4	5
SPELLING	1	2	3	4	5
HANDWRITING	1	2	3	4	5 _____

Such scales, however, must be used with care, and the criteria for each category should be well defined. Students should be made aware of the criteria and have access to the explanations for each rating. Although the scorecard approach is tidy and efficient, too often the sum of the scores gets converted into some grading system. Used too frequently, the scorecard approach tends to destroy the reader/writer relationship between teacher and student, and the student comes to ignore the significance of the evaluation.

PEER EVALUATION

One of the most effective approaches to evaluating student writing is through peer reaction, for immediate response from a group of peers can have more valuable impact on the student writer's perception of his work than perhaps any other device. Sometimes, though, teachers are reluctant to use peer response because initial experiences with it may have proven less than satisfactory.

As in all the approaches mentioned thus far, time must be taken to prepare students for their responsibilities and roles. There are several ways to do this. Some teachers find it beneficial to begin by scheduling several large class meetings in which student writing is discussed, with the teacher serving as moderator. After several of these, students are encouraged to begin identifying specific areas and items which they feel are important and should be evaluated when a piece is read. From this list of mutually agreed upon points, the teacher constructs a guide sheet which is given to each student. Francine Hardaway, for example, suggests the following areas for her students:⁷

Consider the following when assessing each paper:

Thesis stated clearly or is identifiable.

Subject matter clearly developed.

Respect for audience demonstrated by tone and consistent point of view.

Organization apparent in first paragraph; thesis and divisions developed in the middle paragraphs; transitions used; last paragraph concludes.

Sentence patterns made interesting through figurative language, examples, details.

Mechanics used for clear communication.

Students using such a guide sheet must also make specific written

statements which indicate how they arrived at their responses and where the areas of strength and weakness lie in the paper. All evaluations are signed.

A similar approach to peer evaluation can be developed through a series of questions, once again generated by class discussion of student writing and agreed upon by students and teacher. The questions should be open-ended and students should be expected to respond in writing to the questions, their comments being handed on to the writers. Possible questions might include the following:⁸

1. A writer promises to do something. What does the writer promise to do in this paper? How would you express that promise in your own words? Does the writer keep the promise?
2. Can you see an order to the presentation of the writer's feelings and ideas? How would you describe that order? How well does the order relate to the subject under discussion in the paper? What other approach might the writer have used to improve the organization?
3. Has the writer omitted any important details or arguments that would increase the understanding of the writer's position on the subject? Are there details or arguments which do not seem to contribute to the ideas expressed in the paper? Where might the writer add or subtract details? Why?
4. How convincing is the writer's attitude toward the subject? How sincere do you believe the writer is toward what is being said? How can you tell?
5. How appropriate is the language to the author's intent and subject?
6. How well does each paragraph signal to the reader the direction in which the writer is moving? How fully does each paragraph develop the idea or feeling it introduces?
7. How well do the writer's sentence patterns and types relate to the subject?
8. Has the writer observed the conventions of spelling, grammar, punctuation, and capitalization? If not, what justification might there be for the unconventional use?

Students should not be expected to handle all questions each time nor should they feel that they cannot challenge the

way a question is worded if it does not seem to fit a particular situation. Patience and considerable exposure to the practice are essential ingredients if this approach is to have meaning for students. A frequent exercise for each writer after having a paper evaluated in this manner is to attempt to revise the paper in light of the comments received. If confusion about an evaluator's comment arises, the writer can consult the appropriate individual, since each evaluation is signed. If the writer does not agree with the criticisms received from a group, he can call a conference with the evaluators and discuss with them in more detail what his intentions were and why they reacted as they did.

Peer evaluation can relieve the teacher of considerable reading; the time saved can go toward more preparation for classes and more attention to individuals' writing problems. One teacher uses this approach to foster a greater sense of responsibility among students for their own writing.⁹ Students are divided into groups of three. An assignment is given to the groups. One member of each group, after discussion with other group members, writes a draft of a paper. This draft is then discussed by the group in some detail; the writer takes the draft back and revises in light of the comments and suggestions; it is brought back to the group where it is evaluated again; if it is approved, it is put into final form and submitted to the teacher for evaluation--and graded if desired. Each student in the group, however, receives the grade given to the paper. The cycle begins again, then, with a new writer, and the process goes on until all three students in a group have had an opportunity to write. Although the span of time involved may seem rather long--students work on this experience every day for at least two weeks usually--the experience of working together, of responding to and helping each other, is invaluable and pays substantial dividends in terms of students' participation in later evaluation experiences.

ANNOTATIONS AND SUMMARIES

Without question, the most frequent method of responding to student writing is via the marginal annotation. Whether it be through cryptic symbols like "AWK" and "R/S" or through scribbled "blood" notes, the marginal annotation has always been with us. The tone of such comments usually ranges anywhere from sarcasm to praise, with most teachers striving to be as encouraging as possible.

Often, however, the marginal annotation turns into a mini-essay with arrows zinging through space, leading the reader on a merry chase to opposite ends of the paper where the teacher was able to find some extra white space to continue the note. When this happens, most students interpret the paper as a "disaster," although upon closer reading, the comments may turn out to be quite complimentary.

One of the more effective ways of responding to student

writing via the marginal note is through the focusing question or the problem-raising one: "How might this sentence be connected to the next one?" "What would be the effect if you used the last paragraph somewhere in the middle of your paper?" "How might the reader become confused while reading these two paragraphs?" Although such questions may telegraph a possible solution, the interrogatory note seems to help the writer begin to ask similar questions before submitting future pieces.

Writing marginal annotations can take a great deal of time. But if the teacher subscribes to approaching writing as a process, then marginal comments can be prepared in a relatively short time. Treating each draft as part of the process of developing a piece of writing, the teacher need focus on only one or two major problems, perhaps use a few marginal annotations to highlight the problem area, and add a short summary account at the end of the paper. The student then can focus on only one problem without being distracted by other comments, seek additional help if needed, and then get on with the business of preparing a new draft.

Four considerations need to be kept in mind about the summary comment if it is to be useful. Each of the considerations is based on an implicit question that must be answered by the teacher.

1. Evaluating the whole--does the paper have a clear sense of purpose and does it effectively accomplish its purpose?
2. Analysis of strengths and weaknesses--where does the paper succeed and where does it need further work--why?
3. Determination of the major problem--what is the major weakness and how can I make the writer aware of it?
4. Suggestion of future direction--what does the writer need to know and do in order to realize the potential in this piece and future ones?

Although such a specific framework for writing summary comments may seem unnecessary, the teacher should be practicing what students are constantly urged to do--be concise and specific.

CONFERENCES

Personal contact with the student about writing often seems impossible because of large classes, outside activities, and crowded schedules. But the personal conference remains one of the most effective ways of responding to student writing.¹⁰ Finding the time and skill for such conferences is not as difficult as it might seem. Most people envision a conference as a sit-down, face-to-face encounter that occupies a substantial

amount of time. This need not be the case, for often the problem to be addressed does not require more than a minute or two of exploration if we quickly focus on the key problem and address only it. We should resist the temptation to handle all the problems in a paper at one conference just as we should attempt to limit our written comments to one problem area at a time. By careful arrangement of teaching time and activities in the classroom, most teachers can hold conferences. While some students are assessing each other's work in groups, while students are working on revisions, or while students are engaged in some other learning activity, quick conferences can be held. Not every student will need frequent conferences, and by rotating the meetings the teacher should be able to establish personal contact with most students about their writing at least once every other week, if not more often.

The personal conference provides an excellent means for diminishing the notion that evaluation of writing is some kind of mysterious ritual that only the teacher understands. Using frequent conferences elevates the writing process to one of continuing communication, open to public view. It also helps to reduce turn-around time in handling papers.

AND NOW GRADING

Although it is well known that many teachers would favor abolishing grades completely, most present systems do not allow that luxury. So after all the various experiences in responding and revising, somewhere comes the moment when all the effort has to be reduced to an enigmatic symbol that can be entered on a permanent record. Despite the fact that the writing process is a complex and ever-developing activity, somehow the reduction of that activity to a letter or numerical scale provides reassurance to the public that everything is under control. If a grade must be assigned in a writing course because there are not enough other activities that can be "graded," then one of the following methods may be at least a partial solution.

Teachers who use the process approach to teaching writing do not grade the various drafts of a piece; instead, they write highly focused summary comments on each draft, use frequent conferences, and encourage continual revision of writing. At some point in the course--mid-point, end or both--they ask each student to select several types or numbers of pieces which the student feels represent his best work to that point. The student then submits this work for a grade. By having his work treated this way, the student may more fully develop his writing before having it reduced to a letter grade. Although extensive research to validate such an approach has not been done, teachers who use the method report good results and improved attitudes about writing from students.

Another approach is the modified contract.¹¹ At the beginning of a course, students are informed that they will be doing frequent writing. To receive a minimum passing grade, they will

have to produce a certain number of essays which meet minimum standards; they will be able, however, to revise their papers as many times as necessary in order to receive a passing grade. If they wish to get more than the minimum grade, they will then have to meet the criteria for each succeeding level--usually an increase in both the number and the quality of the papers produced; the conditions for revision remain in effect.

The manner in which the system works assures immediate response to student writing. When a student is ready with a paper, he presents the paper in conference to the teacher who reads it and reacts to it during the conference. The student finds out during the conference whether the paper is acceptable or not. If it meets the appropriate criteria, the student moves to the next assignment and the procedure is repeated. Occasionally a student may be allowed to proceed with assignments on a provisional basis and if skills lacking in a previous paper are demonstrated adequately in a new assignment, the provisional rating is changed to acceptable. The control over quality as well as quantity is what distinguishes this approach from the usual contract arrangement and thus avoids the usual problems with quality of work.

Although such approaches to grading are not perfect solutions to the final problem of deciding exactly where a student's work belongs on a letter scale, they do represent a more humane and defensible view than the usual write one, grade one approach in effect in many schools. It is important for us to remember, however, in all evaluating and grading of student writing that the teacher "...becomes an audience on whom pupils...focus a special kind of scrutiny in order to detect what they must do to satisfy him. The peculiar feature of this relationship is that the pupil will see his teacher's response as a means by which his progress is being charted."¹²

Because of this special relationship between student writer and the teacher, we would do all our students a favor by focusing on more long range measurement of student progress, taking into consideration that improvement in writing often is slow, sometimes almost imperceptible in the early stages. We need several areas to demonstrate progress, rather than isolated pieces of writing. Charles Cooper has suggested several areas which could form the basis for a logical measurement scheme of long range growth in student writing.¹³ The areas are as follows:

1. Standard Usage--each student will make fewer deviances from standard written usage. (Measured by count of selected errors in early and late papers.)
2. Syntactic Fluency--each student will achieve greater syntactic fluency. (Measured by examination of the average length of t-units in student writing, a t-unit being construed as a main clause and all its embedded modifiers.)

3. Writing Quality--each student will demonstrate growth in the ability to write an acceptable piece in each of...[here one may place specific types of writing such as narration, description, exposition, journals, etc.] (Such pieces would be measured through peer evaluation, student/teacher conferences and possibly comments of other teachers.)
4. Willingness--each student will show a willingness to write. (Measured by the teacher's recorded observations and the accumulation of papers in the student's writing file.)
5. Valuing--each student will come to value writing and writers. (Measured by the teacher's recorded observations, the use of an attitude scale if desired, and the student's statements.)
6. Workshop Contribution--each student will be willing to make a contribution to his small-group writing activities. (Measured by recorded observations and group self-evaluations.)

Although the particular items in such a scheme might vary from school to school, this approach toward measuring growth in writing seems much more useful and valid than many of the methods now found in our schools, most of which were more the result of desperation than conviction. Within the context of long range measurement of writing ability, the teacher ought to find ample opportunity to use a variety of responses and still arrive at a clear picture of where each student is at any point in a course. Then, if a grade must be assigned, it can be done with the conviction that it represents more than just an ambiguous mark on the pages of a grade book.

FOOTNOTES

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2. Leger Brosnahan, "Getting Freshman Comp All Together," College English, 37 (March 1976), pp. 657-660.
3. Michael Platt, "Correcting Papers in Public and Private," College English, 36 (September 1975), pp. 22-27.
4. Enno Klammer, "Cassettes in the Classroom," College English, 34 (November 1973), pp. 179-180.
5. Russell A. Hunt, "Technological Gift Horse: Some Reflections on the Teeth of Cassette-Marking," College English, 36 (January 1975), pp. 581-585.
6. Paul Diedrich, Measuring Growth in English, Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1974.

7. Francine Hardaway, "What Students Can Do to Take the Burden Off You," College English, 36 (January 1975), pp. 577-580.
8. Adapted from Robert Bain, "Reading Student Papers," College Composition and Communication, 25 (October 1974), pp. 307-310.
9. David H. Karrfalt, "Writing Teams: From Generating Composition to Generating Communication," College Composition and Communication, 22 (1971), pp. 377-378.
10. Charles R. Duke, "The Student-Centered Conference and the Writing Process," English Journal, 64 (December 1975), pp. 44-47.
11. John V. Knapp, "Contract/Conference Evaluation of Freshman Composition," College English, 37 (March 1976), pp. 647-653.
12. James Britton, et. al., The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18), New York: Macmillan, 1975, p. 64.
13. Charles Cooper, "Measuring Growth in Writing," English Journal, 64 (March 1975), pp. 111-120.

In Praise of Criticism

Kenneth Donelson

Most English teachers would probably agree that we need to praise student writing far more than we do. That's Paul Diederich's thesis in his not-recent but most readable and invaluable "In Praise of Praise" in the September 1963 NEA Journal. Diederich does not suggest that we ought to be gullible or bleed for all our students' weaknesses, nor do I. He does recommend that we ought to be teachers, neither martinets nor messiahs.

But if Diederich emphasizes praise, he also suggests that there may be one time when brutality and total honesty would work for the benefit of teachers and students:

Up to this point, I must have given readers the impression that there is no place whatever for brutality in the treatment of student writing. Actually, there is a place for it, when it is used in the following way: Duplicate and pass out to your class one student paper on each assignment. Use an anonymous paper from a different class, so that students who criticize it may be sure that the writer will not be present to have his feelings hurt.

Have the students study this paper as homework, grade it, and mark it up with every sort of criticism and suggestion for improvement. Next day in class, let them argue over their grades and suggestions.

During this session everything bad that can be said about a paper ought to be said, and you may count on the students to say it. You may even have to defend the paper against an unjustified attack.

Since these sessions are an exercise in criticism, I think the sample papers should be of all kinds: good, bad, and indifferent. Some teachers balk at this idea, holding that students should never see an example of admittedly poor writing lest it corrupt them. I answer them by pointing out that the way students write is the result of hearing the language used imperfectly sixteen hours a day, every day of their lives. One more instance of imperfect language, recognized

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as such, and followed up by devastating criticism, is not going to corrupt them more than they have been corrupted already. (pp. 58-59)

I'm convinced that Diederich's point is well taken and deserves considerably more use in classrooms. A number of years ago, I used an assignment several times which worked because the town where I taught, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, was heavily unionized with a sizable opposition to unions and because the topic had some happy implications for clear thinking and doublespeak (though the latter word was not yet in fashion). I asked my students to write briefly in class on the assignment, and then a day or so later before I returned their papers, I handed out a sample set of papers on the same topic written a year or two before. None of the students' papers analyzed were in my class and anonymity prevailed.

The discussion that followed the reading of the papers was often heated, but it was also often stimulating. Seeing how other students had handled the assignment gave my current students some ideas about the different ways we approach assignments, different ways people begin to write, different ways we look at the same words in terms of our different backgrounds and experiences, different ways we organize and phrase our thoughts and words, and different problems we all have in writing anything.

I handed out the set of papers and asked students to examine them overnight. The next day, the kids broke into small groups where they were asked individually and collectively to grade and comment on each paper. Additionally, I asked them to examine the reasoning of each writer to figure out where the writer went right or wrong.

Several features of the assignment and the set of papers worked to our advantage. First, students proved far more aware of the doublespeak implications of the paper and its cloudy reasoning than I had anticipated, and where one student seemed oblivious to either doublespeak or cloudy reasoning, other students were anxious to fill in his lack of awareness. I've rarely stumbled upon a technique for analyzing thinking that proved so provocative. Second, students learned something about the problems of reading and examining (and evaluating/grading/commenting on) other people's work. If they sometimes waxed a little too energetic in demolishing the work and psyche of another human being, humaneness and common decency generally prevailed (and maybe they even picked up a trifling sense of compassion for English teachers who have to evaluate papers and try to help without killing students). They frequently recognized their own writing problems in the papers they analyzed, and some of that shock of recognition seemed to be helpful to them later in their own writing. I'm sure they understood my comments on their own papers, returned a day or so after we discussed the set of papers, a little more than I would otherwise have expected. Third, students gained some insight into a repertoire of different techniques, good and

bad and weak, for writing, different ways of starting papers or ending them, different words or phrases, indeed in a microcosm the sort of thing we spend the entire year trying to get across to students that there are many ways, finite rather than infinite, to do many things in writing. Building students' repertoire of writing techniques is not the all of teaching writing, but it is vital and I believe it is the greater part of composition teaching.

Below is the assignment and that is followed by the set of ten sample papers I used, though whether the teacher might like to use fewer papers is something for the individual teacher to determine. All the papers were written by tenth graders during one class period of fifty minutes. Originally, the papers were handwritten, but they were typed to help later students read them. All the original errors (except those related to the handwriting) were retained.

The following editorial was written by the president of a large national company for use in his company magazine. Read what he has to say noting both what is said and what is left unsaid. You may wish to make notes or underline or in some way mark up his words. Feel free to do so. Please read the text and the directions that follow it before you begin writing.

"Today, July 1st, is my birthday, and I can't help but reflect on the many pleasant things that have happened over the past year and the fruitfulness of our association.

Neither can I help but reflect on and again comment on the situation that existed when I wrote my last article for the June issue. I just want to give you some figures on what happens when irresponsible people make up their minds that 'Come Hell or high water, this is what we want--or else!'

Think this over--as near as we can tell at the present time, the strike occurred cost your company approximately \$60,000 in profits before taxes. Now, let's stop and figure this another way; 10% of this gross profits was actually your money which would have gone into the profit sharing trust for your benefit and the benefit of hundreds of others who were not directly affected by the strike, and, therefore, were innocent victims of the irresponsible actions of a few people.

In checking the records, I find that a few of you who took the most radical actions through this strike have benefits built up in this profit sharing trust amounting to as much as \$5,000 and more. So to me that just simply doesn't make

sense--as a good share of this money that was lost as a result of the strike was your money!

Not only were we hurt as a result of losing business during the ten days that our stores were closed, but we still have not regained the volume that we had before the strike. Through your actions we deliberately invited our customers to trade in our competitors' stores.

I realize, of course, that most of you were loyal--did not want to go out on strike, but were forced to do so through circumstances over which (unfortunately) you had no control. Some of you, however, certainly must have guilty consciences.

Again--I want to state that I am not condemning unions, nor do I wish to object to anyone belonging to a union; BUT--if you do belong to a union, be good union members and attend meetings. See that the unions are run legitimately for the benefit of everyone concerned--union members, employees, and employer.

I hope that I will not have to refer to this again in the future, but I want to state again, "THIS SHOULD BE FOOD FOR THOUGHT FOR EVERYONE."

Your assignment is to write a short paper about the writer and his reasoning. You might want to think about one of the following questions to get started, but feel free to ignore them if you wish. Did the president rise from the ranks of the company? Does the president approve of unions? Does his argument seem calm, well-reasoned, and unemotional? Assuming you had stock in his company, what reaction might you have to the editorial? Assuming you were a union member in his company, what reaction might you have? Good luck.

THEME I

I think that this president is a very intelligent man. In his letter he tries to be sensible and talk reason to his employees. He tells them not only of his and the companies loss but that it is there loss also for striking. They will have a hard time making up for the loss that they and the company took to their competitors, he also states. He was very wise in saying that only a few people were really responsible for the strike and that the majority of the employees were made to strike as members of the union. But he doesn't condemn unions he states that the union members should make the unions work for everynne concerned. He realizes

the the employees need these unions to make them secure feeling. All in all I feel that this president is a exceptional employer and leader.

THEME II

I think if I was reading this article and I was working for this company I would tear up the paper, and throw it in the trash can. This guy sounds like a little kid fighting to steal other kids marbles. I think if there were no labor unions this man would have his employese working and eighty-hour week, and I mean just what I say. If he had his way there wouldn't be a labor union in this country. He wants the employes to be faithful to the union, but he doesn't want the union to have an barginning power. The president doesn't seem seem like the type of who worked very hard. The president has had everything layed in front of him. In other words he spoiled, and probaby will alway be spoil, he doesn't no how hard it is for the average person to make end meet.

THEME III

The president gives an impression of being a very capable leader. His position, obviously one of major importance, means he must preform to major services for his company. First, he must look after the financial interests of his company. Second, he must meet the financial needs of his employees.

In this article, I see a situation in which the president has been caught between his two major obligations. He is, of course, concerned with the financial progress of his company, and this strike he refers to has apparently hurt his business. He is also concerned for his employees. He points out throughout the article that considerable losses have been suffered, and those losses will hurt the employees perhaps more than any one else. His main point seems to be that the employees have not gained financially by this strike, but lost.

His concern for his employees is very important. His view of the unions is also a very fair one. His conception of the good unions can preform for their members is unusual for one of his position who usually sees these organizations as detrimental. His sympathy with those who were forced to strike demonstrates to me that he has had similar experiences. Therefore I believe this man rose to his present position by working up through the ranks of the company.

His article appears to be a reprimand. In an effective, well-reasoned manner he relates to the people of his company the harm they have done their company and themselves.

In conclusion, I think this man shows the qualities of responsibility, concern, and fair mindedness that are important to the position he holds.

THEME IV

This editorial has certainly done what it was designed to do--arouse emotion in me. But the kind of emotion is not what the author wanted because I have concluded that the president is a not-so-clever egotist, condescending, convinced of his own worth, and the thought of being wrong has never entered his head and never will of its own accord!!

This editorial is written to inspire a friendly, fatherly image of its author. He tries to reason with the poor, misguided workers by taking a part of the facts and using them for his purpose without saying anything about the causes for the strike. He fails to mention or hint at any possibility of reason for the workers' actions. In effect he says, "Why do you wish to hurt me, your own comrade, and hurt yourselves so much more at the same time?"

In order to preserve his image as "champion of the Common Man," so that no one can "construe" his comments, the president includes his encouragement for all union members to make their unions "good" ones--in other words unions that don't strike, at least not at his company.

The feeling I got is that this was a diversionary tactic, designed to focus attention upon the workers' faults, to take their minds from their grievances, to cause strife among them. To make up for their illogical behavior, he will allow them to continue as they had been and not blame them even though he has himself been deeply hurt. The mention of his birthday tells much--he is saying, "Oh, what a fine present you have given me! But I won't let something like that bother me!"

I should hope everyone of his company could see through this article--it shouldn't fool anyone.

THEME V

The president seems to be a understanding man. He writes his editorial with conviction. He gives

facts that back up his reasons and opinions. He seems to be scolding his employees for their actions, praising and blaming. He doesn't lay the blame on any one particular party, but he implies that he knows who primarily is responsible for the strike.

The president of the company was in a ticklish situation. It is his job to see that things run smoothly. When the strike came, he was in "hot water". He had to pacify the workers, try to keep them on the job, and keep production rolling. When he failed, money was lost, production was lost, and they couldn't be regained.

My first reaction, if I were a worker, would be anger. I quote, "Through your actions we deliberately invited customers to trade in competitive stores." Here he blames the employees for the strike and losses following it.

Then again in the next paragraph he tries to pacify them. He tells them it really wasn't their fault. Then I think my reaction would be disgust at the president. He didn't seem very sure.

THEME VI

While what this person says is certainly true, he fails to present the union's side and I shouldn't imagine that he wanted to. The article is extremely ineffective, reflecting strongly the character of the person writing it. Immediately we judge him to be egotistical and insecure. He has little knowledge of his employees and was probably born the son of the firm's president. A pretext of approving of unions is expressed, although basically he resents them and those who belong to such bourgeoisie organizations.

I judge this person to be inefficient, unoriginal and, in general, a person that enjoys the luxuries of life and is quite cynical of those below him. The thoughts expressed are cliché and rambling, much as is his character.

The situation that has developed is foreign to him, and he has obtained the hard facts which he uses from his advisers. In remarking on the situation he becomes over-emotional, irrational, and extremely subjective. While being irate and vindictive, he strands his true feeling in sickening niceties and "parental" advice which must have given the article's readers a number of laughs.

THEME VII

The president of this article is in my opinion a well-balanced, calm, and tolerant man. From his calm style of expressing himself he shows clearly that he has mastered self-restraint. From his explanation of the strike it shows he is a learned man.

In his explanation of the strike he tells how he realizes that the blame is to be placed mostly on a few strong headed individuals. Which are of a minority and he realizes that little guilt should fall upon the majority of his employees. This shows he is a good judge of character.

Instead of getting angry he explains calmly that when people go on strike they are not only hurting the company as they many times think but they are hurting themselves as well as those who are satisfied with their wages and who are content to work at normal wages. He realizes that these people were not the cause of the strike, but were forced to follow suit by other members. This shows his unselfish wish for sucess of his company and the sucess of his workers.

He states that he is not against unions but he believes that if a person belongs to a union he should be loyal, truthful and honest to the union so his employer, his fellow employers and other people connected can benefit from the union membership.

If I was a member of the company and I was among the people who started the strike, I would be ashamed of my self. But if I was a member of the group who tried to remain loyal I would have pride in my boss, my self, and my company.

THEME VIII

The president of this company is a man who wants to save his company money. And also protect his men working for the company. He also tell the problem his company has to face if they want to go on. The president must have come up in the ranks because he know something the men that work for him have to do. The president doesn't condemn unions but he said if a person belongs to a union he should attend the union meeting and keep well informed about his union.

The president tell about the men who work in the company and the situation his company is in at

this time. He said at one time his stores were closed for ten years but they came back and built up business again. The argument seemed very calm, well reasoned, and unemotional by the way he said it.

If I was a member of the company I would reaction might be very good, it would open my eyes to the matter about unions and the troubles my company is getting into.

THEME IX

My evaluation of this man, his situation and his reasoning is as follows:

The situation he is in is very good. Many pleasant things that have happened over the past year. The fruitfulness of his association. He was in an all together situation for ten days when his stores were on strike. On those ten days his stores lost \$60,000 in profits before taxes.

His reasoning on the strike was that some people who took the most radical actions through the strike had benefits of \$5,000 or more.

Mr. K said something about unions. He did not condemn unions, nor wish to object to anyone belonging to them.

"But" said the man, "if you do belong to a union be good union members and attend meetings. See that the unions are run legitimately for the benefit of everyone concerned union members, employees, and employer."

THEME X

The president seems mad at his men for going on strike. He didn't approve of the strike. It seems to me like his father left him the business, because all he can think about is the money he lost. If he would have worked his way up through the ranks, he might have seen why they went on strike in the first place. He might have made an agreement sooner, and he would have saved some money.

"Correction" Is Surely the Wrong Word

William W. West

One of the final chapters in Ed Farrell's excellent volume, Deciding the Future, begins with a quotation from an "anonymous" letter. From internal evidence in the letter itself, most people familiar with research in English education can deduce the name of the writer--and the fact that he is a respected authority adds prestige to an already poignant statement:

My own research has convinced me that red-inking errors in students' papers does no good and causes a great many students to hate and fear writing more than anything else they do in school. I gave a long series of tests covering 580 of the most common and persistent errors in usage, diction, and punctuation and 1,000 spelling errors to students in grades 9-12 in many schools, and the average rate of improvement in ability to detect these errors turned out to be 2% per year. The dropout rate is more than enough to account for this much improvement if the teachers had not even been there. When I consider how many hours of my life I have wasted in trying to root out these errors by a method that clearly did not work, I want to kick myself. Any rat that persisted in pressing the wrong lever 10,000 times would be regarded as stupid. I must have gone on pressing it at least 20,000 times without any visible effect.¹

An even more dramatic demonstration of the fact that "Correction" is surely the wrong word is to be found in the 1970 report of the National Assessment of Writing. Some 8,600 adults between the ages of 26 and 35, selected according to a nationwide probability sampling plan, were given a single essay exercise. The report gives the results:

...it should be pointed out that nearly one-third of the adults received a score of "0" on their papers--29% either did not attempt to write the essay, or indicated in some way that they could not or would not do so.²

The information that almost one-third of those tested refused to write is bad enough, but a little further along the report becomes even more devastating:

Examples of only two qualities of writing

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were selected for adults, since it was impossible to select examples which about 85% produced.

When the three "typical papers" are reproduced with the notation, "53% wrote papers at least as good as these," the reader can estimate how truly bad the other 47% must be; those printed fail to identify and clarify the subject, fail to develop support for the opinion expressed, and fail to observe many conventions. At best, the sins of omission and commission indicate haste, carelessness, and a distaste for writing.

Although many variables regarding the NAEP testing program and the performance of the adult writers affected the results, it is possible that the predominant system of composition correction--which has persisted for over fifty years--is partially to blame for making adults (and students) refuse to write. Dozens of research studies, in addition to the personal report from the anonymous panelist in Farrell's study, suggest that the time spent in paper correction is not paying off:

Lois Arnold and Dwight Burton discovered that there is "...no evidence that intensive evaluation is more effective than moderate evaluation."³

Winnifred F. Taylor and Kenneth C. Hoedt found that a group of students receiving praise without correction improved as much as another group whose members received criticism with correction--and the first group wrote more and had more favorable attitudes.⁴

A. Confrey discovered that of the comments written on student papers by forty instructors in first-year English in eleven different colleges and universities 36% were worthless, 45% not helpful, and fewer than 20% gave students any direction that would improve their writing.⁵

Paul B. Diederich, John W. French, and Sydel T. Carlton discovered that when ten English teachers and 43 other raters from other fields were asked to classify 300 two-hour compositions by college freshmen into nine piles in order of "general merit," 94% of the papers received either 7, 8, or 9 of the 9 possible grades, and no paper received less than 5 different grades.⁶

These, and dozens of other studies might be cited to show that (1) correction has a negligible effect on student progress; (2) students and adults find writing difficult and distasteful--possibly as a result of having suffered from "correction"; (3) correcting everything is no more valuable than correcting a few things--and may even be harmful (or more harmful); (4) students

will write and improve and have better attitudes if they receive praise, rather than correction; (5) most time-consuming correction is of little help to students anyway; and (6) correction is inevitably based on different standards and values and varies both with the corrector and the corrector's state while correcting! In addition, a keen insight regarding "correction" comes from Eileen N. Wagner: Correction is often aimed--not at helping students or at guiding growth in writing--but primarily at justifying a grade! And that, says Ms. Wagner, is the hard part, the time-consuming part, the student-stifling part, and the composition-eliminating part! Frank O'Hare suggests in addition the parallel between John Updike's writing twenty stories in order to publish three and the desirability of student's writing twenty papers to submit three.⁸

Correction suggests that the student is "wrong" at the outset--that he's not the ordinary learner in any other field making natural, inevitable fumbles, errors, boners, and pratfalls.

Correction suggests the teacher possesses the single, absolute, immutable correct response.

Correction condemns the teacher-reader to a negatively critical, unappreciative, adversary approach to reading papers.

Correction evokes in the student "an equal and opposite reaction" making him resent writing and avoid writing situations.

If "Correction" is surely the wrong word, what, then, is the "right" word and the "right" approach?

Stephen Judy suggests "explorations"--short, focused, experimental papers--far from polished, formal compositions--which free a student and allow him to investigate divergent kinds of expression without fear of criticism.⁹ West suggests "composition equivalencies," or short, specific, focused, in-class, self-rewarding, uncorrected activities in which students tackle, under guidance and with both student-product models and teacher-modeled process, ways of handling specific communication problems.¹⁰ Frank Hey recommends careful guidance during close analysis of good literature.¹¹ Ken Macrorie suggests committed but unstructured writing as students express significant ideas and "truth" either for self realization or for communication.¹² Daniel Fader suggests free, uncorrected writing of a personal journal.¹³

There are many different alternatives to the "lone and sullen craft"--to borrow Dylan Thomas' term--of writing, correcting, and revising. The important thing is that each of the authorities cited has realized both the futility and the impossibility of improving student writing by "correcting it."

Whatever alternative you select must involve these elements:

1. Interest, stimulation, and purpose. The student must have a "reason for writing." "Good students"--the collegebound students--have a "built-in reason for writing": they want to learn how. Other students must be tricked, cajoled, "gamed," and even coerced into sufficient writing experience to learn how to write.

2. Instruction. Yes, elements of writing can be taught, modeled, exemplified, imitated. Assignment of writing without instruction in how to do it is probably useless.

3. Workshop production, with a permissive atmosphere permitting interaction and group composition and cooperative revision. If, as some authorities believe, composition activities should occupy 50% of English class time, there can be no better use than the actual composing process.

4. Use of the communications. Most--but not all--of the material produced in and for a class ought to be used with the class. Some purely personal material must remain private. Sharing with some kind of audience is the best kind of feedback and reward and a suitable alternative to grading and correcting.

5. Teacher response and reward--and a feeling of progress. "Reading" papers--as opposed to "correcting" papers and justifying a grade is actually easy and fun. Some authorities believe that simply providing students with a communication situation and the opportunity to write is enough, but my personal experience has been that they need to know that somebody cares, that somebody responds to what they have written, and that somebody believes that what they've done is worth doing. The response needn't come on every paper; it shouldn't be effusive if praise isn't justified; it shouldn't involve ranking or grading; and it can take many different kinds of shapes--from informal whispers, recorded analyses, posted appraisal, to projected re-shaping.

Few English teachers today would limit students' reading only to the few books of the 32,000 published yearly that they themselves are able to read; yet dozens of teachers restrict students to the teacher's own limitations by saying, "If they've gone to all the trouble of writing something, then

I've got to read it." And they solve the problem of not being able to read everything by assigning nothing. By recognizing that "Correction is surely the wrong word" for what English teachers should do with student writing, teachers can begin to remove their own anxiety that has caused the decline of writing assignments and skills.

FOOTNOTES

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